

AN AFRICENTRIC THEORY OF SELF AND HEALING:
PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING IN THE
AFRICAN AMERICAN CONTEXT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Since the arrival of the African in America as slaves, systems of treatment, medical, social, and pastoral, and educational have arisen out of philosophies, epistemologies, and ontologies of Eurocentric worldviews which embrace minimally the realities of Africentric worldviews. Consequently, the label of pathology, psychopathology in particular, is too often placed on behavior patterns of individuals within African American communities.

The diminution of an Africentric reality, which has African ideals, principles, and beliefs at its center, distorts African American's context, and strips the African American of inherent tools with which to negotiate survival and healthful living within a racist society, self intact.

This dissertation proposes a holistic model of self and healing that arises out of an African cosmology, and the cultural context of the African American in the United States which implies the restoration of the tools necessary to negotiate survival and healthful living to the African American community as its members strive to flourish within the context of both African and Western worldviews. The dissertation addresses, as well, the ideological core that must exist must necessarily exist at the center of such a theory, concomitant with the contextual/cultural realities that exist for the African in the United States today, in the quest for healing and

wholeness. African spiritualism, and its subsequent evolution within the slave culture as it existed in the United States, is that core element of an Africentric theory of self and care.

Although this project is written from the author's Christian perspective, its implications for pastoral theology, healing, and care within African American communities are viable from any other religious perspective.

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To that great cloud of witnesses...hotep!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

To drink from your own well is to live your own life in the Spirit of Jesus as you have encountered him in your concrete historical reality. This has nothing to do with abstract opinions, or ideas, but it has everything to do with the tangible, audible, and visible experience of God, an experience so real that it can become the foundation of a life project. As the First Epistle of John puts it: "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched---we speak of the word of life."¹

African reality has been distorted and devalued as it has evolved in the United States among African Americans. The insidious voice of the dominant media, both electronic and print, throughout the centuries, has portrayed the thought systems of Africa as primitive and superstitious. Religion has been characterized as ancestor worship, hoodoo and witchcraft. During early explorations of the continent of Africa by colonizers, missionaries, and researchers, characterizations of the continent, and consequently, stereotypes, emerged, depicting Africa as the dark continent, mysterious and unknown. Its peoples were deemed as inferior in cognitive processes, in the way they practiced religion, and in the way they lived, simply because their practices were different from the practices of those early explorers. Judith Evans, a reviewer of psychological research in Africa, states that "Africa, the dark unknown continent, is no longer dark and unknown. Man's knowledge of Africa and its people continues to expand. From primitive global descriptions of Africa our understanding has been increased to the point where we can talk intelligently about specific areas within Africa

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), xiv.

and discuss them in relatively sophisticated anthropological, economical, and political terms.”²

African reality is distinctly different from a European or western reality. African culture---values, mores, religions, ways of knowing---all emanate from African thought systems, its worldview. As Africans were transported throughout the diaspora during the slave trade, their culture, their worldview was intrinsic to their cultural identity; their identity could not be separated from their worldviews. Throughout the last four centuries, the development of African American life and history in the United States is interwoven with the context in which Africans were brought to the New World, and has been laced with barriers of such magnitude that the deleterious effects upon the psyche of African Americans cannot be denied.

Africans reached the shores of the colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. Dwight Hopkins, African American theologian, writes that a “foundational representation of black bodies as commodities for white use and exchange value became reality in the New World,”³ his characterization of the barter of abducted Africans from their homeland of Africa for food with the leaders of the Jamestown settlement, otherwise known as the Atlantic Slave Trade. This system of barter existed for four centuries and involved the transport of over ten million slaves. Though historians agree that it is not possible to ascertain an accurate figure of the numbers of slaves brought out of Africa, historian John Hope Franklin states,

²Judith L. Evans, introduction to Children in Africa: A Review of Psychological Research (New York: Center for Education in Africa, Institute of International Studies, Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1970), 1.

³Dwight Hopkins, Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 17.

In 1861 Edward E. Dunbar made estimates of the number of slaves imported into the New World and these figures were widely accepted during the following century. He estimated that 887,500 were imported in the sixteenth century, 2,750,000 in the seventeenth, 7,000,000 in the eighteenth, and 3,250,000 in the nineteenth. In 1969 Philip Curtin challenged these estimates. Basing his findings on exhaustive studies of records of slavers, records of slave importations, slave populations in the New World at various times, regional and ethnic origins of slaves imported into the New World, and other pertinent data, Curtin estimated that there were 241,000 imported in the sixteenth century, 1,341,100 in the seventeenth, 6,051,700 between 1701 and 1810 and 1,898,400 between 1810 and 1870. His estimate of the total number imported between 1451 and 1870 is 9,566,100.⁴

These figures do not take into account the slaves who died in the holding castles of the West Coast of Africa, the slaves who died resisting capture, or the slaves who died during the passage. The Atlantic Slave Trade marked the beginning of a new reality for Africans in America, a reality that was undergirded by a sustained and unprecedented violence imposed upon them in every conceivable manner; a violence that would define the basis for their existence and survival in this country. Much of this violence has been physical violence, however, African slaves, and subsequent generations of African Americans have endured violence psychologically, emotionally, and socially.

Molefi Asante, an African American cultural analyst, states that commentators, ignorant of African philosophy and culture, have often imposed Western constructs and values on material that grows out of coherent, albeit different, traditions. The result has been a failure to understand or value that material, as well as an inability to recognize or correct that failure.⁵ The imposition of constructs of European culture onto the masses of African peoples brought into this country, initially as slaves, made and continues to make a traumatic impact on the psyche of Africans in America in violent and brutal ways.

⁴ John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 35.

⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, The Afrocentric Idea (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 19.

Given the constraints imposed by slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation and systemic racism upon the behavior and lifestyles of African Americans, they were left to their own ingenuity to inculcate ways and means to practice their thought and culture as they had known it. Subsequently, with the succeeding generations of Africans in America, a different culture has arisen among them that bespeaks the African American's life experience in the United States.

Statement of the Thesis

I contend, in this dissertation, that, African spirituality, as it has evolved from African belief systems, and its subsequent evolution through slave culture, segregation, as sustained by Jim Crow laws, and racism, as it exists in the United States, through each generation, is the core and critical element of any Africentric theory of self and care that engenders health and wholeness for the African American.⁶ The "core" is that element that possesses the life blood of a culture, its dynamism, and is inherent in the worldview of a people. The core suggests process by its very nature; it is paradoxical and it is integrative. The core spawns life and care and healing. I will argue that the core is the essence for African American life and well-being and is indeed, the essence of the Creator. For theories and therapies of self and healing to be efficacious for African American communities, those theories and therapies must evolve from the ideology of said people. The derivation of the concept of self, of theology, and sociology, in fact, all aspects of life, lies in a people's belief systems, in their ideology. However, for African

⁶Asante coins the term "afrocentric," which means, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior. The spelling of the term was later changed to "africentric" to reflect a parallel with the spelling of the continent of Africa.

Americans, from their beginnings in the United States, their thought system has been thoroughly compromised by life in the United States.

Discussion of the Problem and Its Importance

A difficulty that has lent to the dilution of a coherent thought system for Africans who were brought to the United States by slave trade has been the lack of a written history. With the abolition of slavery as a legal institution in the United States in 1865, the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and other landmark legal decisions that gave certain freedoms to African Americans, one being the right to be educated, the face of America's history has now begun to reflect the myriad contributions of its African roots. With the prevailing worldview in North America arising out of European ideals and thought, the expression of African cultural traditions and mores became largely an underground activity, in which case, oral tradition worked to the advantage of the African American. However, a marked disadvantage has been that, as people die, a part of African American history and culture dies as well. Asante terms this oral tradition of Africa as “‘orature,’ the total body of oral discourses, styles and traditions of African people.”⁷

As an African American, my childhood was pervaded by such tales as follows:

Ghosts feel hot and smell faintish. According to testimony all except those who died in the dark may visit their former homes every night at twelve o'clock. But they must be back in the cemetery at two o'clock sharp for they will be shut out by the watchman and must wander about for the rest of the night. That is why the living are frightened by seeing ghosts at times. Some spirit has lingered too long with the living person it still loves and has been shut out from home.⁸

We children sat at the feet of our elders, listening to them tell these tales from their

⁷ Asante, Afrocentric Idea, 19.

⁸ Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., The Book of Negro Folklore (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co, 1983), 191.

own childhood. We came from throughout the community to hear them; we were drawn to the experience. These stories were not only amusing and entertaining; they were a means of transmitting folkways, tradition and values, and ways to understand what occurs in one's world and to understand one's self. Singing, sermonizing, and praying together were other means of transmitting culture as well as values and traditions in their own right. All of these activities characterized life in the slave culture. Inherent in these activities were resources for survival for the slave; these activities function as resources for African Americans generally, up to the present time. Raboteau recounts a narrative of former slave Wash Wilson.

When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. De masters...didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's, so us nacherly slips off at night, down in de bottom or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.⁹

While their own spiritual needs were served through these religious activities, many other purposes were served, as the narrative implies. The songs that the slaves sang were often means of communication; they were rampant with vital information for escapes from their masters, for meetings, for transmitting interpretations of biblical texts and for passing messages from one plantation to the other. The responsibility for transmitting cultural values that make for a sense of self that one can esteem, and that contributes to health and wholeness becomes an elusive and onerous task when the life experience of the people is interlaced with rudiments that are nebulous, violent and menacing.

The childhood tale above reflects, as well, the belief that the African world has a dual reality, physical and metaphysical, material and spiritual. The physical world is the

⁹ Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 213.

existential reality, the spiritual world is hinted at. However, basic to African thought systems is the tenet that these dual realities are not oppositional, neither is dominant over the other; they are co-existential, inextricably interwoven, thereby constituting one worldview that is dual in nature. Although the ghost inhabits the spiritual realm, there is no barrier to prevent such a spirit from visiting a loved one in the material realm and making its presence known.

As a result of slavery in the United States, entire systems of philosophy, epistemology and ontology were forced underground and thereby diminished and diluted, depriving a people of inherent tools with which to negotiate a holistic, meaningful, and viable life. In later years, however, with the commitment of African and African American scholars to the written word for the development of systematized thought, African theology, epistemology, ontology and other disciplines have been taken more seriously around the world. Nonetheless, the stigma of the diminution remains to the present time. This stigma serves to perpetuate racism in all its subtleties; it engenders patterns of behavior toward African Americans by a larger society that reflect attitudes of fear, superiority, and suspicion, behaviors such as: racial profiling by law enforcement officers; stalking by retail employees, ostensibly to prevent theft; and low expectations of performance, particularly in the academy. Throughout the centuries and up to the present day, the internalization of this imposed identity contributes to and accounts for the hurdles and obstacles that the African American must confront in the attempt to live a whole and healthful life.

To live as an African American in the United States is to live in an environment that denies one's worldview to the extent that it negates one's perspective, denies one's

context, and violates one's sensibilities. Yet, amid this violation and violence, the African American expects to and is expected by society to survive in a viable, meaningful and tenable way, maintaining a sense of self that is healthful, whole and productive to one's life.

During slavery, survival tactics were facilitated out of a religious consciousness and spirituality that emanated, specifically, from their African cosmology. These were a people, upon arriving in North America, that was stripped of their names, families, language, their drums (which served as a means of communication), and music, in order to serve the purposes of the colonizers in America. Slaves were subjected to severe punishment if they were caught expressing the beliefs that emanated from their ideology. Their beliefs manifested in all aspects of their lives--- in their theology, in the foods that they ate, in their relationships to others, God, and self, as well as in how they named their young. The slaves did persist in the expressions of their worship in secret, in the "hush harbors" deep in the woods where they could not be heard, in their cabins where they prayed and sang in whispers. More beneficent masters allowed their slaves to attend the masters' Christian churches, albeit in separate seating in the balcony. In the masters' churches, the sermons generally consisted of admonitions to the slaves to obey their masters and not to lie and steal. Raboteau characterizes religious life for the slave thusly:

In the New World slave control was based on the eradication of all forms of African culture because of their power to unify the slaves and thus enable them to resist or rebel. Nevertheless, African beliefs and customs persisted and were transmitted by slaves to their descendants....One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave's culture, linking African past with American present, was his religion. It is important to realize, however, that in the Americas the religions of Africa have not been merely preserved as static "Africanisms" or as archaic "retentions." The fact is that they have

continued to develop as living traditions putting down new roots in new soil, bearing new fruit as unique hybrids of American origin.¹⁰

The distinct religious consciousness that permeates all of African life was constituent to one's lifeblood as a slave in America. Though there were diverse religious beliefs among the slaves, because they were taken from diverse regions of Africa, enough commonality did exist, however, to allow a general description of the religious heritage of the slave. Moreover, regardless of the religion of the African, one's spirituality was rooted in a common source, the ideology of the peoples. Therefore, for the African slave in the United States, the strength for survival, endurance, and nurture emanated from this religious consciousness.

With the abolition of slavery, African Americans were thrust into a society where they were ill-equipped to function as whole, healthy persons, having been dehumanized for centuries. They were no longer afforded the perverse protection of their slavemasters.

The problem for African Americans as they exist in the United States today is the insidious nature of systemic racism and discrimination that has evolved since being brought to the shores of this country. Even after the abolition of slavery, African Americans were denied the right to vote. The system of racism permeates every facet, every aspect, of everyday life for the African American: it affects employment, relationships, the manner in which one moves through this society, one's education, the right to drive the automobile one wishes to own without fear of reprisal (from police) for owning it. Racism is violent; racism is painful; racism evokes and instills anger, which, in turn, engenders rage. The existence of this reality for the African American is an impediment to health and growth. This reality systematically defines how the African

¹⁰ Raboteau, 4.

American negotiates and mediates behavioral responses for survival or for healthful living within this society. Violence and its effect upon African Americans in the United States have been the foundations upon which the African American has been identified by the Eurocentric society for the most part. African Americans are generally characterized as a violent people, and their behavior patterns are characterized as pathological. According to Thomas Kochman, "No search for an underlying structure to black behavior was undertaken, because none was presumed to exist."¹¹ This identity serves as a justification for the perpetration and perpetuation of racist behaviors toward African Americans in the United States.

In the spring of 1992, the viscera of life in the United States for the African American were exposed to all the world. An uprising erupted in the city of Los Angeles, (and in several large cities throughout the United States), in response to yet another perceived expression of injustice by a dominant social system. On this occasion, four European American policemen were exonerated by an all-white jury after having brutally beaten an African American male who was attempting to elude them during an automobile chase. The African American male, who was intoxicated, intimidated fifteen policemen in attempting to escape their wrath. They clubbed him and kicked him until he was no longer moving, actions that were caught on videotape by a private citizen. Property owners within the inner cities became the victims of perhaps a displaced anger of many African Americans and other peoples of color who proceeded to burn and loot buildings and to attack European Americans or those perceived as such who happened to cross their paths. For many in the European American community, this uprising provided

¹¹ Thomas Kochman, Black and White Styles in Conflict (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 8.

reinforcement of the negative stereotypical attitudes prevalent in many of those in the dominant culture about the nature of African Americans. For many African Americans, the uprising underscored the injustices dealt to African Americans because of white domination and the hopelessness experienced as a result of such injustices.

Historically, the pervasive voice of the media has consistently reported this segment of society, the African American community, as rife with high crime, high incidences of violence, drug abuse, and disproportionate numbers of persons receiving Public Assistance and incarceration in jails and prisons. All of these patterns are deemed pathological by society in general. Cobbs and Grier believe that it is critical that white America is informed of the history of the African in America if racist hostility is to subside.¹²

These media reports, which seem offensive to society overall, seem equally offensive to the African American, primarily, for two reasons. First, these reports are made with little or no knowledge, understanding, or consideration of the cultural or belief systems of the African American. Therefore, the reports effectively perpetuate certain myths and stereotypes and exacerbate existent tensions among our cultures in American society. Second, this steady flow of reports perpetuate, as well, a state of hopelessness and despair experienced by many African Americans as a consequence of systemic racism and discrimination in America. Gayraud Wilmore, African American theologian, describes life for the African American, and for the male in particular, as profoundly affected by systemic racism in this country, specifically as it contributes to the cycle of

¹² William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage (New York: Basic Books, 1968; reprint, New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 4.

poverty, hopelessness, violence, despair, criminality and incarceration in which the male often finds himself.¹³

A response to patterns of racism and domination by a white society is reflected in the belief by many in the African American community that there is a conspiracy to destroy African American males in American society. The alleged aim of the conspiracy is the genetic annihilation of the African American population of the United States toward the goal of white supremacy or white power domination; the conspiracy is systemic and systematic in that it begins with black boys. This is a strong indictment, indeed, but one that bears some consideration. Jawanza Kunjufu, an educational consultant, describes this conspiracy as very complex and interwoven. The perpetrators of this conspiracy range on a continuum from very visible to less visible to silent. Those who ascribe to racism, imperialism and white male supremacy are the very visible; those who promote drugs and gang violence are easy to identify; and those at the silent end of the continuum are a passive group of educators, parents, and European American liberals who deny being racist, but through their silence, allow institutional racism to continue.¹⁴

According to Jewelle Taylor Gibbs

Too much emphasis has been placed on “blaming the victims” for their own victimization and for the consequences of over three centuries of discrimination, deprivation, and denial of equal opportunity. Double standards have been applied in a blatantly hypocritical attempt to attribute immoral and deviant motives to black youth for the same kinds of behaviors for which white youth are ignored, excused, tolerated, or exonerated.¹⁵

The media has pointed, as well, to the development of the African American child

¹³ Gayraud Wilmore, ed., Black Men in Prison (Atlanta: ITC Press, 1990), 1.

¹⁴ Jawanza Kunjufu, Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys (Chicago: African American Images, 1995), 1-36.

¹⁵ Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, preface in Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species, ed. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs et al. (Dover, MA: Auburn House Publishing, 1988), xxii.

in areas such as intelligence, perceptual cognition, cognitive development, as being latent or inferior to children of dominant western cultures. When internalized, these reports wreak a violent impact on the psyche of African Americans, which, in turn, influences violent behavior patterns. While not all African Americans are entangled in this cycle, all are susceptible to it, simply because of the easy identifiability of darker skin color.

Africans were imported from different areas in Africa as slaves in 1620 to supply the demand for labor as more and more European nations began to colonize America. Africa is a large continent, comprised of many countries. Slave trade began on a limited scale from among tribes inhabiting the west coast of the continent. As the demand for slave labor in the United States increased, the slave trade reached to Central and East Africa as well. Eventually, Central Africa became the great mother of slaves for exportation, while the villages on the West Coast served as the warehouses where the slaves were stowed away, awaiting the ships to carry them to America.¹⁶ The Elmina Castle and the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana stand as museums today, exacting a nominal fee for an historical tour of the castle. They stand as legacy to Africans in Africa and Africans in the diaspora today.¹⁷

The African American community in the United States has been the subject of a continuous struggle by the scientific community, which continues to be dominated by Eurocentric perspectives, to identify and define the elements that account for its status and functioning in society. Research literature has consistently shown the African

¹⁶ William O. Blake, The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade (Columbus, OH: H. Miller, 1860), 98.

¹⁷ I have had the opportunity to visit the Cape Coast in Ghana, West Africa, where I embarked upon tours of two slave castles. Although they were termed castles by the Europeans, they served as dungeons. In the rooms of the dungeons where slaves were held captive were windows of approximately 10"x10" in size (one window per room). The dirt floors were raised approximately two feet beyond their original

American as comparatively less equipped, less endowed, less viable, and less successful than European American counterparts. The basic question that is consistent within this research is whether the African American's deficits, as compared to the European American, are a result of environmental or hereditary factors. Myers, Rana, and Harris see this negative-comparative perspective as an impediment to an exploration of more generic and less value-laden questions about the nature of development of self of the African American.¹⁸ The black child is defined as an inadequate version of the white child; the white child is idealized and becomes the norm for the researchers. Therefore, an integral study of the nature of the black child is lost or, at minimum, is restricted to this negative-comparative perspective. There is also the contradictory assumption by researchers, as well, by a large segment of the African American community, that an African American child is the same as the white child, except for differences in skin color and economics. Therefore, what is good for one is good for the other. The research literature has pointed to the development of the African American in areas such as intelligence, perceptual cognition and cognitive development, as being latent or inferior to those of dominant Western culture. These are the areas in which African Americans are typically adjudged to be inferior, and consequently, that adjudication serves as hypotheses for much of the research done in African American child development. For example, Witty and Jenkins examine the hypothesis that the American Negro is inherently inferior in intelligence in light of two corollaries: one, that Negro individuals with the largest amount of white ancestry should stand higher, other things being equal,

levels. The tour guide explained to us that we were standing not on dirt, but on the excrement, blood, and bones of dead African slaves of long ago. These experiences will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁸ Hector Myers, Phyllis Rana and Marcia Harris, comp., Black Child Development in America, 1927-1977 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), xi.

than individuals with total or large amounts of Negro ancestry, and two, Negroes making the highest test scores should be those who emanate from admixtures, predominantly white. Similarly, Richard Dogbeh reports of G. A. Heuse, a French researcher in Africa, who writes, "The American Negro has no aptitude for higher mathematics for evidently neurogenetic and psychogenetic reasons; mathematical symbolism is closely linked to capacity and is reduced in the Negro to what can be called 'apherastenia' in regard to the white."¹⁹

One's development of self concept, understanding of whom one is as a person, is profoundly affected by the demands and challenges of the social systems in which one lives.

Over the span of my life I have witnessed and participated in systems of treatment and education of the African American that have arisen out of philosophies, epistemologies and ontologies of Western worldviews that reflect European thought. As an African American woman, born, raised and educated in the South, the great granddaughter of a slave, my education, from kindergarten through undergraduate school, was in segregated educational systems which were fraught with maladies that are concomitant with racist practices and attitudes. Lower standards were held for African American children than Caucasian children. These standards were reflected in

¹⁹ Richard Dogbeh, "Intelligence and Education," in Readings in African Psychology from French Language Sources, ed. Frederic R. Wickert (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1967), 43. In Dogbeh's note: "In view of the importance of these assertions which show how interpretation of observed facts are often contradictory in psychology, and perhaps every other science, we continue the quotation from M. Heuse: 'In fact, the negro by his hereditary personality and psychology is unfit for certain Euro-American functions, in contrast to the white who can perform them by the very fact that he invented them in accordance with his natural aptitude.' Heuse, G. A. Rev. Psychol. Des Peuples, 4th trimester, no 4, p. 376. Editor's note: This reference is in the form given by the original author in France; further information regarding this reference was not available to the editor."

substandard buildings, used and insufficient schoolbooks and other teaching materials, no cafeteria, no science labs, no school buses for transportation to the buildings used as schools that were over a mile away from our neighborhood. The curricula was substandard as well; African American children were not exposed to the subjects taught that were required for Caucasian children, particularly in science and mathematics. My older sisters were educated in an old Black church and in an old converted army barrack until 1950. At that time the city government built schools for both the African American and Caucasian children; for the Caucasian children, the building was a newer and more efficient edifice; for the African American children, they were gaining a school building for the first time. Because the schools were not built with equal standards, African American parents within the community boycotted by not allowing their children to attend the school. However, the boycott was to no avail in terms of gaining equal standards. After a certain period of boycotting, the parents decided that the children were being deprived of the education that they were receiving, although it was inferior. Therefore, the children had to return to school.

As time progressed and I attained a college degree and entered the workforce, I became a caregiver, in the broadest sense of the word, acquiring positions as caseworker and casework supervisor in county welfare systems over a period of eighteen years in the inner cities of Newark, New Jersey and Atlanta, Georgia. The districts in which I worked in the inner cities were predominantly African American. In the completion of my Clinical Pastoral Education, I did year-long stints as chaplain in a large county hospital and a state mental institution. I later worked as a chaplain in a multiethnic private school in Los Angeles (K-12); as juvenile court attendant; schoolteacher, and pastoral

psychotherapist in my own clinical practice; as pastor of an inner city church, and as campus minister/professor at an undergraduate college in Kentucky. In several of these positions, caseworker, caseworker supervisor and as campus minister/professor/counselor in my present position, I am often expected to administer services from procedures, rules and regulations formulated from a perspective that gives little weight to cultural needs or expectations of those served. In my current position as campus minister, my duties include creating worship services and events that are designed to include elements of worship in the Black Church tradition. My duties arise out of a need for African American students who attend Berea College to worship within a context that provides the pastoral presence and spiritual nurture that have traditionally emanated from style (preaching, prayer), music, theology, testimony, and culture. Even with such a mandate, constraints that are placed upon me as I do this work often derive from a lack of sensitivity or understanding toward cultural needs.

With the capture and transport of Africans as slaves over the centuries, the transport of these Africans throughout the Middle Passage,²⁰ and the institutionalization of Slavery in the United States, a process was set in motion that relegates a people, their practices, and their view of reality, to a place of diminution. This reductionistic view of African reality serves effectively to perpetuate certain myths and stereotypes regarding African Americans and to exacerbate existent tensions among our cultures. The misidentification that accompanies such a view, particularly when internalized by the African American, contributes to a diminished sense of self. European colonizers, for centuries, have employed methods and tactics of domination of peoples throughout the world that have

²⁰ The voyage that carried Africans into slavery across the Atlantic Ocean to various ports, including the United States, was called the "Middle Passage."

left said peoples disempowered and bereft of human will. Consequently, the label of pathology, especially psychopathology, placed on the functioning and the behavior of African Americans in the United States, by a dominant society, may not and often does not apply. Nancy Boyd Franklin, in her book, Black Families in Therapy, characterizes Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report for the U. S. Department of Labor on Black families in America as having painted a devastating picture of the Black family.²¹ Moynihan termed the Black family as "a tangle of pathology." He saw the Black family as highly unstable and approaching complete breakdown. A primary factor for Moynihan, in painting this picture of the Black family, was his estimation that the role and status of the Black woman engendered and perpetuated a matriarchal culture, which does not conform to "normal" family structures of the dominant culture. Such reports as Moynihan's perpetrate stereotypes that are internalized by African Americans as well and contribute to the cycle of hopelessness and despair that characterize many African American families. Generally, many African Americans, in the successive generations since slavery, are victims and victimizers alike, of and by the loss of basic tenets, folkways, and traditions that underline an understanding of who we are as African Americans and why cultural mores manifest in the patterns that they do. Many traditions are not passed down to succeeding generations because of persistent negative stereotypes. An Africentric worldview must be restored within the African American community in order for healing to obtain.

At the basis of an Africentric worldview is its ideological core, the essence of its culture, which defines whatever formulations, creations, or mores that are constructed to

²¹ U. S. Department of Labor, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Washington, DC: U. S. GPO, 1965), known as the Moynihan Report.

regulate and normalize patterns of behavior and operation within that society. One of the ways in which Africa's ideological foundation has manifested itself is through its religions, through its spirituality, and, in fact, its spirituality permeates every other aspect of life in Africa, existentially. The material and spiritual realms are not dichotomous but exist interdependently, in dialectical relationship, one informing the other.

The existence of Africans in the United States of Americans, that is, African Americans, has been and continues to be one of struggle for emancipation from forces of domination, oppression, and social injustice. This struggle is fraught with a violence that spans a spectrum of impact, in terms of force, as well as the manner in which the blows are struck. The struggle to maintain an ideological base, one that gives rise to one's identity, one that fosters one's sense of belonging, is critical to healthful living. Slaves, as a whole, were denied civil liberties as basic as the right to learn to read and to write English, to congregate together, to worship according to their faith traditions; these things and more were used as a means to subjugate, dominate, and stem rebellion against their masters.

The cultural reality defined by this patriarchal system of domination that exists in the United States and which emanates from a western worldview, historically, rife with dualisms, has profoundly affected the selfhood of the African American. Cultural anthropologist Marimba Ani states,

Europe's political imperialistic success can be accredited not so much to superior military might, as to the weapon of culture: the former ensures more immediate control but requires continual physical force for the maintenance of power, while the latter succeeds in long-lasting dominance that enlists the cooperation of its victims (i.e., pacification of the will).²²

²² Marimba Ani (aka Dona Richards), Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), 1.

Although England emerged as a major importer/exporter of slaves in Africa, various countries, such as the United States, Portugal, and Brazil imported and exported slaves at different periods and from different ports along the African coast. When governments of Europe embarked on explorations to the New World for development, the necessity for laborers in that new land became paramount. Sources other than Native Americans were necessary as the natives' susceptibility to the diseases of the Europeans was great, nor were they suited to the rigor and the strict discipline of the hardy work needed for agriculture, therefore, the slavery of Native Americans was not profitable to the Europeans. According to historian John Hope Franklin, "The search for acceptable workers in large quantities became a major preoccupation of the English and Spanish colonists in the seventeenth century."²³ In the first half of the seventeenth century, landless and poor whites were employed in the capacity of laborers; they were brought to the colonies as indentured servants. This arrangement proved ineffective as well. Franklin states that "the terms of service was the source of constant irritation for all concerned until their indenture had expired; many went so far as to sue masters and ship captains for illegal detention. Many of them ran away...and it became increasingly difficult and expensive to apprehend them once they got away."²⁴ It was easier for a runaway white to integrate into society than a runaway black because of one's white skin color. In the long run, Franklin opines, black-skinned slaves were cheaper. "In a period

²³ Franklin, 35.

²⁴ Franklin, 36.

when economic considerations were so vital, this was especially important. Negro slavery, then, became a fixed institution, a solution to one of the most difficult problems that arose in the New World.”²⁵

Nevertheless, great profits were to be had from such a trade, which contributes to the fact that the demand for slaves as laborers was a priority for these governments. Competition was high among the slavers, for amassing numbers of slaves needed for profit was not an easy task. Gross ruthlessness existed within this business. Slavers did not simply sail into a port and begin loading slaves for transport; a certain protocol did exist in the trade. They found it quite difficult to fill a ship of considerable size with enough slaves to make the trip a profitable one.

Franklin gives an account of a particular ship, the *King Solomon*, which arrived at established trading posts on the West Coast of Africa. Stationed at these posts were slavers, who maintained friendly relations with the natives because these natives were necessary for the procurement of slaves. These trading posts were representations of the European governments and merchants with vested interests in the trade. The posts were also where the goods for trade were stored; therefore, they were guarded by soldiers. The protocol consisted of approaching the chief of the territory and negotiating to trade within that given domain, securing, as well, local natives to secure slaves. The posts were susceptible to traders from competing countries, interlopers, and natives who were interested in the merchandise without the medium of barter. Native Africans were complicitous in the slave trade. It could be surmised that without their cooperation, the trade would not have enjoyed the success that it did, nor would that complicity have

²⁵ Franklin, 36.

become such a blight in Africa's history, given the far-reaching and lasting effects upon the people and the countries within which they were displaced.

Because slavers needed great numbers to supply the demand for slaves, the immediate vicinity of the port was soon depleted. Therefore, slavers invaded different villages and tribes further inland, without regard to the maintenance of kinship ties, common language, or the like. They sometimes had to put in at many different ports to supply their demand for natives. These slave ships had to be equipped with appropriate goods for the trade and with provisions for the journey to the United States.²⁶

Because the Africans were seized from different tribes and different countries in Africa, depending on the availability of this human commodity and other exigencies, when they reached the United States, the result was the existence of different languages, customs and religious belief systems. This was another impediment to the slaves' existence in the New World and to their acculturation process.

It is important to note that slave ownership was not an anomaly in Western Africa. Slavery did exist as an institution in West Africa prior to the arrival of the European slavers. Historian Zayde Antrim, specialist on Islam in sub-saharan West Africa, states,

Since most West African societies did not recognize private property in land, slaves functioned as one of the only profitable means of production individuals could own. West Africans, therefore, acquired and expressed wealth in terms of dependent people, whether as kin, clients, or slaves.²⁷

Africans, particularly coastal rulers and merchants, were involved in slave trade before

²⁶ Franklin, 40-42.

²⁷ Antrim was interviewed in *Wonders of the African World*, narr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Confronting the Legacy of the African Slave Trade" [exploration of 6-part PBS videocassette]; accessed 26 Aug. 2004; available from <http://www.pbs.org>.

the arrival of the Europeans. These coastal rulers and merchants had control over the coastal lands and waters. They were literally in control, as well, of the movements of the slavers on the waters.

All in all, the die was cast, the stage was set for the timbre of life for Africans in the United States with this passage across the Atlantic Ocean...human beings of African descent locked in the bowels of so many slave ships, chained together as animals throughout the voyage, leaving kith and kin for untold destinations, millions dying along the way from starvation, beatings and filthy conditions on the ships; from suicide, fratricide and from simply being unable to withstand the brutality of their fate, essentially, from heartbreak. The Middle Passage leaves an indelible imprint upon the memories of all those who are descending generation after generation from the ancestors who were forced to take this fated journey. As an African in America, one's choice to be alive in that memory, even for a moment, is an act of courage and trust. The memories of the torture and suffering on the ships that crossed the Atlantic Ocean carrying their Black human cargo are unfathomable, even today, though this trade existed across the span of four centuries, ending during the nineteenth century. The tendency for us all as human beings is to deny that such an ignoble event exists as a part of America's history, indeed, is to deny that the very foundations of the United States of America were built on the labor of such ill-begotten gain. However, the spirits of those slaves live on, crying out to be acknowledged, even by their own people.

I alluded earlier in this chapter to being a visitor to the slave dungeons on the Cape Coast in West Africa on two occasions, in June 2002 and in January 2004. The first visit was a two-week mission trip with a team comprised of six persons. The second trip

was with a class of eighteen students from the small liberal college where I work as college chaplain and professor. My first trip was a confirmation of my own imagination of what Africa would be like. My experiences were surreal. I had come as a spectator, a missionary. Our mission was to enlighten the African peoples in a small rural community in Northern Ghana, Nalerigu, about the dangers of pre-marital sex, HIV, AIDS, and abortion, through skits, story-telling, sermons and a form of Vacation Bible School. The entire experience was surreal for me, partly because the mission demanded that I separate my being from these people in order to missionize, and partly because of my fear of the unknown, of what to expect of Africa. In grappling with the myriad feelings that I was experiencing during this trip to Africa--feelings of disgust with myself for being a spectator, feelings of anger at being powerless, feelings of anguish as I watched African children clamor for whatever objects we could give them--I realized that we were the symbols of dreams deferred. We were Americans; we were from the land of milk and honey. They dared to believe that we were different than they. They dared to believe that we had found the escaton.

Toward the end of my two-week stay in Nalerigu, Ghana, I began to realize that my stay on the continent of Africa was like a return to the land of "home" in many different aspects; I belonged. The community among the peoples that I witnessed there was not unlike the community among African Americans in the small town in Alabama in which I was raised. I speak of community as emphasized by common ties, social cohesion and interaction, and of moral commitment to one another. The geography of the region was flat and lush with greenery, intermingled with areas of red, sandy clay. That vision resonated within me as well. I felt safe here. The level of poverty that existed was

not unlike poverty I have seen and known here in the United States among African American people. I was not different. In fact, I was home again.

It was at the end of this trip that I contacted a friend, Dr. Joseph Mante, a graduate of Claremont Graduate University, who had returned to his homeland of Ghana and was then Dean of Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra. My second trip to Ghana resulted from that contact, not as a mission trip, but as a co-teacher of eighteen students to lead a short-term course, "Journey to Ghana: Reclaiming Wisdom through Music, Philosophy and Religion." The course was re-titled for our trip in January 2006 as "Journey to Ghana: Reclaiming Self and Wisdom through Religion, Philosophy, Culture and Sustainability." This title now reflects more accurately what the students gained from the previous trip. In reading the journals and final papers that resulted from this course, it is undeniable that the students' sense of self and identity was thoroughly enhanced, both black and white students.

At Berea College, I work as chaplain, pastoral counselor, and teacher of African and African American Studies courses. In my work, I encounter many of the approximately two hundred fifty African American students who are searching for some groundedness or mooring in their struggle for identity. Many of these students have been recruited from urban areas, such as Greenville, South Carolina, and Birmingham, Alabama to this rural, predominantly white school.²⁸ They struggle with their identities

²⁸ Berea college is a tuition-free institution of 1500 students, 21% of whom are African American. The college is situated in Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachia, and is committed to Appalachia's poor. The college was founded in 1855 by a white Presbyterian minister, John G. Fee, when the institution of slavery was very much alive, to promote interracial education among blacks and whites. The state of Kentucky enacted the Day Law in the early 1900s for the purpose of separating the races. Another college was erected for African Americans to attend separately at that time. The college was not reopened to African Americans until after the lawsuit *Brown vs. Board of Education* in the 1950s. It has struggled since that time to sustain its original legacy. For further information regarding this institution, go to <http://www.berea.edu>.

as African Americans. Many do not understand why they are called “African” Americans. They struggle with the racism that they encounter here in this environment. As a pastoral caregiver and counselor, I encounter many of them at the point when they have been devastated by acts of racism that they have experienced in and out of the classroom or when they are at the point of academic probation or suspension. I have discovered, as a whole, that the majority of these students lack coping skills and resources to nurture themselves. Armed with this knowledge and concern, I proposed and am now teaching Berea College’s first course on African American Religion, entitled “African American Religious Traditions,” beginning, necessarily, with religions in Africa as well as the short term course mentioned above. Of the eighteen students who journeyed to Africa with us, fifteen of them returned with a newly found respect for who they are as “African” Americans, proud of their heritage. Three of these students are European American students; they, too, returned not only with new sensibilities for Africans/African Americans, but with their own identity issues named as well.

The African Americans were able to see African connections and retentions in their own lives, in their parents, grandparents, and in their churches and communities. One student noticed that when we ate at one university’s cafeteria, the students were not given silverware; the males ate with their right hands, scooping up the food in a particular manner...the same manner in which her grandmother sometimes eats her collard greens and corn bread. Many students saw retentions in other ways, in the movements in the dance classes in which they studied, in the call and response and dancing in the churches we attended. As students were making these connections and identifying retentions, they themselves were connecting; they were in the process of reclaiming.

I continue to be affirmed that in order for healing to begin in the minds, spirits and bodies of African Americans, that first step must begin with a reclamation of self, with some understanding of and connection to the historical, social and cultural context of the evolution and adaptations of the self. There is no question that there has been and continues to be an eternal psychocultural, political, economic, social and even physical impact on the selfhood of African Americans, resulting from a history of slavery and oppression and racism. Most recently, a European American student at Berea College was chosen by the Drama division of the English Department for the much touted and coveted Senior Project over an African American student who had met all prerequisites for the honor and had received rave reviews for her previous work in the school theatre. The African American student was devastated by this action. The Director of the Drama division, who is European American as well, clearly believed that the English Department had made the wrong decision regarding the project and encouraged the African American student to confront the department with her own sense of the injustice that she felt was done to her. The student did this and raised the consciousness of the members of the department, who are all European Americans. In the end, however, the student had been so affected by the action that she breaks down in tears during her drama class as they prepare to present the winning student's project. She has to maintain a façade of participation and acceptance when she does not wish to appear as though she is at peace with the action taken by the department. She struggles with feelings of hatred, of herself, of the European American student, and of the English Department. Further, she begins to question her abilities and skills as an aspiring director. She feels helpless in terms of holding her self together in a presentable and acceptable way to her community.

Yet, she must, in order to function at an optimal level in society and to acquire a legacy for ascending generations.

This student belongs to a generation of young people who are alienated from the knowledge and understanding of the history of African Americans in this country. The media's representation of the American dream, touted to be accessible to all, clouds the reality of life in the United States for African Americans for the present generation and lulls them into the sense of security that implies, "if one works hard, follows the game rules, then, one can attain one's goal in life." Of course, each succeeding generation of African Americans since the first slaves embarked upon these shores has been and continues to be susceptible to the belief that the American dream belongs to all citizens of the United States of America. When the realization sets in that the American dream is an illusion, particularly for Africans in America, the quest for self, for identity, for a hitching post, an anchoring for security is daunted. The realization does set in, when African Americans go into real estate agencies to purchase homes in certain neighborhoods and are denied the opportunity to purchase for nebulous reasons, or are turned away as potential tenants in apartment rental properties, while white counterparts are accepted as tenants. Even in this present day, burning crosses are clandestinely placed in the front yards of the homes of African Americans who have dared to move into white neighborhoods, in order to frighten them into moving out of those neighborhoods. Cross burnings are symbolic of the racist organization, the Ku Klux Klan, which is quite an active organization today. Under the cover of darkness, its members seek to intimidate African Americans through acts of burning crosses in their front lawns. In the past, sometimes these acts were accompanied by pulling people from their homes to lynch,

castrate or murder or to commit some other heinous crime against them. Oftentimes, one only had to cross the social boundaries set by the oppressor for African Americans to be subjected to such violent acts. But, by and large, one's only crime was to be black in the United States of America in order to be victimized in this manner. As an educator, cultural and social critic and prolific writer on race, love, community and other topics, bell hooks says that many black people

do not know this thing we call "difference." Systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, and racism actively coerce black folks to internalize negative perceptions of blackness, to be self-hating. Many of us succumb to this. Yet blacks who imitate whites (adopting their values, speech, habits of being, etc.) continue to regard whiteness with suspicion, fear, and even hatred. This contradictory longing to possess reality of the Other, even though that reality is one that wounds and negates, is expressive of the desire to understand the mystery, to know intimately through imitation, as though such knowing worn like an amulet, a mask, will ward away the evil, the terror.²⁹

Paul Laurence Dunbar, a premier African American writer and poet, penned a poem, "We Wear the Mask," which signifies the creativity that African Americans employ as defense mechanisms in order to make it through this society alive.³⁰ Dunbar speaks of the bleeding hearts and the tortured souls that are hidden by the masks that black folks wear, in hopes that the masks will save us. Further, Dunbar's poem alludes to the fact that the dream of the world is that our history and our present, perhaps, do not exist. One may conclude that the African American who enters, as well, into this system of denial may be complicit in his/her own demise. Cornel West, social and political analyst and professor of Afro American studies and philosophy of religion, terms the phenomenon of the dehumanization and racialization of Africans in America alongside

²⁹ bell hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995), 32-33.

³⁰ Paul Laurence Dunbar, The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1913), 71.

the building of a democracy that proclaims freedom and equality for all and that provides for the American dream, as paradoxical. He states:

The great paradox of Western modernity is that democracy flourished for Europeans, especially men of property, alongside the flowering of the transatlantic slave trade and New World slavery. Global capitalism and nascent nationalism were predicated initially on terrors and horrors visited on enslaved Africans on the way to, or in, the New World. This tragic springboard of modernity, in which good and evil are inextricably interlocked, still plagues us. The repercussions and ramifications of this paradox still confine and circumscribe us---in our fantasies and dreams, our perceptions and practices---in these catastrophic times.

Yet the "natural" state of American society is to deny this paradox and downplay the grave consequences of its past and present reality. Instead, race is reduced to specks on our cultural lens to be cleansed in order to be "color blind" (after more than three centuries of African slavery and seventy years of Jim Crow). Or is it recast as ethnicity so that we all become immigrants who rejoiced upon landing in America (even if black people's right to vote was delayed for nearly two hundred years after 1776). In other words, America's historical amnesia about black humiliation and black suffering is seen as a basic prerequisite for a better American future of racial harmony. Yet history---the past as history and the present as history---will not let us off so easily. The lofty claims of American exceptionalism that holds this country to be somehow outside the iron laws of history ring now more hollow than ever. No civilization fails to reap what it sows. No nation escapes the poison of its ignoble paradox.³¹

The effects and consequences of such a history that African Americans have experienced continue to shape and inform how the African American is perceived in the United States today and for the most part, how the African American perceives her/himself. The tendency of the majority of the masses of this nation is to minimize the historical reality of the hideous past of this nation; to fail to educate its citizens, both African American and others, in such a way that shame and guilt do not prevail as the predominant outcomes; that offensiveness and defensiveness are not the prevailing modes of language and behavior that emanate from ostensible problem-solving discussions and seminars that

³¹ Cornel West, foreword to Spirits of the Passage, by Madeleine Burnside, ed. Rosemarie Robotham (New York: Simon Schuster Editions, 1997), 9.

address race and racism. Yet, to shift this paradigm of education on race, racialization and racism in the United States would require a radical understanding of what it takes to create community in this society.

The displacement of millions of Africans from their homeland had and continues to have myriad implications upon the self of the African American, as well as his/her physical, spiritual, and emotional health and well-being. The adjustment to a new land and to their roles as slaves was a radical departure from life as they lived it and knew it. The cosmologies of the African world and the Western world are radically different, which is not to say that either is superior or inferior to the other. The thought systems are simply different. African slaves were introduced into a new order upon their arrival in the United States, an order that was deemed by their captives superior to theirs. Therefore, their way of being, their sense of belonging, was severely compromised by the social and political constructs that would comprise their identity in this place.

African historians, philosophers and theologians, among others, have found themselves with an ethical mandate to reconstruct and define African thought systems primarily because of the existence of oral culture in African life. While orality remains a basic and important element of African culture, the lack of a written history has contributed to the loss of systematic thought systems. It is the opinion of African studies professor, Masizi Kunene, that, had the African continent not been occupied and its institutions disrupted and undermined, it would have been unnecessary to define or to reconstruct African thought systems.³² Regardless, the reconstruction and definition of African thought systems provide for the African American and the African as well,

³² Masizi Kunene, "African Cosmology," Paper presented at African Thought Systems Seminar, Center for Process Studies, Claremont School of Theology, 5 March 1988, 1.

fundamental knowledge in understanding who one is and thereby, fueling exploration into all aspects of life, health, and healing. The liberation of the African American from Europe's intellectual imperialism and its political/cultural domination is absolutely necessary for wholeness and healing to be achieved for the African American. In Ani's critique of European cultural thought, she says,

The secret Europeans discovered early in their history is that culture carries rules for thinking, and that if you could impose your culture on your victims you could limit the creativity of their vision, destroying their ability to act with will and intent and in their own interest. The truth is that we are all "intellectuals," all potential visionaries.³³

Ani's critique of Europe's thought and behavior is decidedly polemical and aggressive. She adapts this style of rhetoric in this work as her contribution toward the demystification of European thought and behavior.

Discussion of the Thesis

There is widespread agreement among African American psychological theorists Joseph A. Baldwin (aka Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon), Wade Nobles, Linda James Myers and others, that the basis for African American psychological theory must derive from an Africentric worldview.³⁴ However, there are differences in formulation, articulation, and understanding of the criteria that define such a worldview. These theories, as well as my own, are rooted in African cosmology, a central component of which is the concept of a dual reality of the physical world. This dual reality posits the physical world as coexistential with the metaphysical world, with neither reality being

³³ Ani, 1.

³⁴ Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon,, The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework (Tallahassee, FL: NUBIAN Nation Publications, 1992; Wade Nobles, Africanity and the Black Family: The Development of a Theoretical Model (Oakland, CA: Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, 1985); Linda Myers, "Transpersonal Psychology: The Role of the Afrocentric Paradigm," in African American Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice, ed. A. Kathleen Hoard Burlew, et al. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 5-17.

dominant at the expense of the other. That is, one's spiritual reality and one's material reality are so integrated, so complementary that they must exist as a totality in terms of being. African American theorists interpret this dual reality in various ways, many of which do not extend to necessary depths for healing and restoration of esteem of self to occur and that are so essential to the psyches of Africans Americans living in the United States today. These theories oftentimes fail to bridge or connect the gap between the concepts that are identified as being essential and ensuing theories that indicate healing.

Although several African American theorists articulate a basic theory that posits spirituality as core and critical to Africentric psychological theory, I find psychologist Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon's (aka Joseph A. Baldwin) explication of such a theory very much akin to the theory I present in this work. The difference in Kambon's theory and the theory that is articulated in this work lies in our formulations of what spirituality evokes, provokes, and allows for in the African personality. Kambon's theory stops short of explicating what the spiritual dynamics look like within the healing process, especially the continuous, communal, and interactive nature of that process. Neither theory negates the other in any way; perhaps, our different disciplines can account for our points of departure in our articulations; his being psychology, mine, theology and religious studies. Kambon identifies six basic components that define Africentric theory: (1) the theory must be grounded in African worldview and philosophy; (2) the model must have a clear biogenetic determinant³⁵ that would be able to account for distinctions that characterize

³⁵Kambon refers to a "biogenetic determinant" as the behavior and function and overall condition of biopsychological distinctions that characterize Africans and Europeans wherever they may be dispersed throughout the world. Kambon bases his work on the assumption that there are fundamental differences between the natures of African psychological character and non-African psychological character; therefore, an understanding and assessment of the African psychological character can be derived only from the African worldview. Kambon, 76-107.

Africans wherever they are dispersed; (3) the model should identify the core that defines the uniqueness of the African personality; (4) the model must explicate how European oppression and domination have affected African personality function; (5) the model must define how to restore and nurture normal functioning; and (6) the model must provide African Americans with psycho-cultural referents that imply liberation.

Kambon hypothesizes a fundamental organizing principle of the African personality that he terms the African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO). He specifies the ASEO as a complex and dynamic biopsychical system that generates several African cultural-specific psychological and behavioral traits; it comprises the basic energy source that is a property of the system as well. Kambon characterizes the ASEO with several basic characteristics, the primary one being an “innate-biogenetically determined, immutable, unconscious, and deeply-rooted psychical energy or dispositional potential that exists in all people of substantive African descent” which he defines as the concept of “spirituality.” He also sees spirituality as the key ingredient in ASEO, “which defines the African psychological process as a dynamic physical-metaphysical unity extending from the personal to the cosmic levels of communal phenomenal experience and expression.”³⁶

Of the six basic components that Kambon theorizes as definitive of Africentric psychological theory, the third component, “the model should identify the core that defines the uniqueness of the African personality,” would describe his concept of spirituality. I concur with Kambon’s theory and hypothesize further that mystical properties are inherent within the “spirituality” that allow for the ability of African Americans to conceptualize paradox and to indeed live within paradoxes; that these

³⁶ Kambon, 44-53.

mystical qualities obtain from Africa's worldviews. These worldviews came to America with enslaved Africans. African "spirituality" has been a powerful resource and basis for the evolution of African American spirituality throughout centuries of slavery and racism in the United States in sustaining health, life, and a sense of self that engenders wholeness. However, African "spirituality," by its very nature, has to reflect processuality and energy that elicits a continual state of mediation in the composition of any model that implies healing and wholeness for the African American.

The concept of the African American self has not been delineated in detail. Again, given its holistic and paradoxical nature, this has proven to be a considerable undertaking in the Western world. African American theorists have generally taken a stance on Western psychology in its exclusion of African perspectives and its norms preparatory to defining self. That stance takes as its basic guiding principle an Africentric worldview, in naming and developing African American psychological theory which, in its dynamics, is congruent to African American cultural reality. The emergence of a worldview for Africans in the United States despite the legalized oppression suffered by Africans for centuries, a worldview that has facilitated their survival, is a testament to the significance of power and empowerment within their primary worldview that must be explored. Further, if one core element can be identified, it could provide a basis for formulating theories and therapies toward health and wholeness within the African American community. Like Kambon, in my own view, spirituality, in its manifestations and functions, is a fundamental core of viable psychological theory.

Spirituality has existed as an abstract concept and a concrete concept at the same time, interwoven into the fabric of being for Africans and African Americans, and

efficacious for their survival to the present day. However, many African Americans today, for whatever reasons, are alienated from the essence of African spirituality and fail to comprehend its efficacy as an essential resource in effecting healing in the African American community. Moreover, there has been a failure within the African American community to transmit the essential nature of African spirituality to succeeding generations. African American spirituality, in its evolution through slavery and the years preceding the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, fueled the creation of survival skills, spawned the foundation of many of the organizations and programs, and the inspired leaders who emerged during those years of the Movement – the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Committee of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to name a few. Once again, a new reality had come into existence for African Americans. An empowering spirit engulfed the community and motivated many to work in the Movement for justice and liberation for African American citizens.

The African American Church has borne the onus for transmitting spirituality throughout the generations; however, with each succeeding generation, this spirituality has become hybridized to such an extent that its essence has been compromised and the Church has become more and more predisposed toward personal, social, and political power for its leaders. The transformative property of spirituality has lessened in the culture and lends little to care, hope and vision for the healing of the African American psyche. The ability to draw upon spirituality, with its properties as understood within African cosmology, in a conscious, intentional and reflective way while maintaining the intersubjective nature of such a spirituality has been obscured and compromised by the

desire of many African Americans to experience the “American Dream.” The viability of spirituality for continued survival and health and optimal functioning in a racist society is lessening with each generation of African Americans. Spirituality has always been a vital component of the African American experience. However, with the influences of time, modernity and westernization and other elements, African Americans have lost sight of its significance to life, of its role and function within the African American thought system.

Given the nature of this existence in the United States as I have described, how is one’s concept of self developed and perpetuated through internalized patterns of behavior within the African American community itself? What is the influence of the findings and conclusions of scientific research on cognitive development, perceptual cognition and intelligence of African Americans on how the concept of self is derived? What effect, historically, have these conclusions had on the design of educational systems in the black community? How are behavior patterns formed? Can theories and therapies that portend healing and wholeness for the African American within this context be developed? These questions signify the importance of the problem for African Americans and society in general.

It is within the framework of these questions that this exploration is undertaken. I propose that within the context of pastoral counseling, there are essential components that would necessarily comprise a theory for healing, a theory that would emanate from the historical, cultural evolution of the African in America, the core and critical component of such a theory being spirituality or religious ideology.

Definitions

Various terms will be used in this dissertation that require some definition in light of the author's conceptualizations of the terms. The definitions are listed as follows: *African American* is a representation of a racial group in the United States whose origin stems from the continent of Africa to some degree. Though there are admixtures with other races, their representation remains *African American*. The representation for this group has evolved since the onset of slavery in the United States from *Nigger* to *Colored* to *Negro* to *Black* to *African American*. Some references will be made to *Negro* as it relates to research done when the term was in common usage. The term *African American* and *Black* will be used synonymously and interchangeably as a representation of this particular racial group in the United States. *Black* is also used as representation of those persons whose descendants are among those who arrived as slaves in America and other countries in the diaspora. However, during the 1960's, at the time of the Black Power Social Movement, the change of identity representation from *Negro* to *Black* was a basic thrust. The idea was to move African Americans from the self-hating *Negro* to the self-accepting *Black*. The term *Black* continues to be used by many African Americans. The signification of the terms *Nigger* and *Colored* has evolved to a meaning that is perjorative, derogatory, and demeaning and will not be used in this dissertation.

The term *violence* is defined as any force that impacts one's worldview to the extent that it negates one's perspectives or sensibilities. This definition is used to facilitate reconceptualization of the term. The implication of this broad and general definition is to demonstrate the pervasive and insidious nature of violence. *Violence* is not always a term

that connotes behavior that is destructive or pejorative; its connotation spans a broad spectrum. It ranges from such acts as awakening one gently from sleep to slapping one in the face. It is a violation of one's reality of being asleep to be awakened; to be slapped is a violation of one's expectation to live without being slapped, without experiencing physical pain. In the reconceptualization of this term, *violence* becomes necessary to our existence, our communication and to our community in the world.

Rupesinghe defines *cultural violence* as "denial of identity, security, and symbolic meaning. It is important to conceptualize *cultural violence*, particularly when tradition and identity are challenged by modernization and westernization."³⁷ Nona Cannon characterizes what Rupesinghe deems *cultural violence* as *indirect violence* and defines it as "any type of harm except direct physical injury. It may include economic, governmental, political, social, personal, and/or other policies and practices that result in inequities, injustices, inequalities, disrespect, oppression, discrimination, violation of human rights, emotional pain, poverty, and deprivation of basic human needs. It is psychologically harmful and is incompatible with peace."³⁸

Peter Berger, cultural theorist, defines *culture* as "the totality of man's products."³⁹ Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergeson and Kurzwell in Cultural Analysis state further that "these products manifest the subjective meanings or intentionality of those who produced them. The fabric of *culture* then is the intersubjective meanings individuals hold concerning the

³⁷ Kumar Rupesinghe, "Forms of Violence and its Transformation," in The Culture of Violence, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe and Rubio C. Marcial (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1994), 23-24.

³⁸ Nona H. Cannon, Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace (San Diego: Miclearoy Publishing, 1996), 17.

³⁹ Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 6.

world in which they live.”⁴⁰ Although there are numerous definitions of *culture*, Berger’s definition is more congruent to the concepts and ideas that I wish to present in this paper. This definition implies inclusivity, wholism and integration of one’s world that is inherent within the basic nature of an African worldview.

Spirituality, like *culture*, is defined in numerous ways. But for the purposes of this paper, *spirituality* is a “process by which people interpret, disclose, formulate, adapt, and innovate reality and their understandings of God within a specific context or culture.”⁴¹ I extend this definition to include, “or any other higher power.” African *spirituality* simply denotes the foundations upon which this particular spirituality is based, i.e., the continent of Africa and the worldview of its peoples.

Methodology

There is a dearth of literature that explicates African self-theory in a systemic manner and because a construction will be derived in this study, the methods I will employ are varied. For this task then, these methods are utilized:

1. I will use the grounded theory approach,⁴² which involves a general method of comparative analyses. For this study, I will examine the culture of African slaves in America in order to extract those elements that were helpful in sustaining their lives and care of the self in the midst of violence and violation. I will also determine whether or what form these elements, if extracted, can obtain for liberated African Americans in the healing of the self in the midst of violence and violation as well. I will integrate the

⁴⁰ Robert Wuthnow, James Hunter, Albert Bergeson, and Edith Kurzwel, Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 35.

⁴¹ Carlyle Fielding Stewart, Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness: Soul Force, Culture, and Freedom in the African-American Experience (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 1.

⁴² Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (New York: Aldine Publishing, 1967).

elements of the conclusions gathered from the data in order to formulate a theory of self from an Africentric perspective. Analyses will be done of selected case studies from my experience as chaplain, educator and pastoral counselor, as well as from personal experiences from the perspective of this formulation.

2. A review of psychological literature on the development of self concept in the African American will be undertaken, noting specifically the themes of violence and violation inherent within the literature itself. This exploration sets a conceptual framework in which to understand the negative impact of slavery as an institution in the United States, as well as systemic racism, on an African American sense of self.

3. I will explore the literature of African American authors, their poems, prose, and slave narratives, naming and extracting those tools that are so intricately interwoven within those works, and that are significant in the healing process. There are specific authors who use themes of African and American American historical and social experiences in their prose and poetry, tying those themes to care and esteem of self and community.

4. I will develop a composite of philosophical, epistemological, theological and ontological concepts from a systematic study of the African cosmology that undergirds an African American worldview.

This dissertation is undertaken with the intention of extracting a modicum of those elements in the history of Africans brought to the United States of American as slaves, that were efficacious in their healing and survival during that time; determining that these

same elements, albeit they manifest and are used in ways that are more commensurate with the context of the present day, in the healing of the self of African Americans.

For centuries, African Americans in the United States have lived their lives within a certain context; a context that has been, and continues to be, rife with dehumanization, pathology, violence and destruction. Though the faces of these elements have changed throughout the centuries, this characterization of life in the United States for African Americans holds true. For centuries, there have been intermittent strides toward freedom and healing by African Americans for African Americans, and by any means necessary. Some of these efforts are recorded in the annals of history, efforts made by movements and figures such as: Gabriel Prosser of Virginia, a slave who, with over 40,000 other slaves, was involved in a revolt in 1800 before he was betrayed and then executed; Nat Turner, a slave who led a bloody rebellion against slave owners and their families in Southampton, Virginia in 1831 before he was quickly captured and executed;⁴³ Sojourner Truth, a freed slave and abolitionist who, in the late 1860s, began leading slaves to freedom; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Marcus Garvey, who led the “back to Africa” movement under the heading of the Universal Negro Improvement League in 1919; A. Philip Randolph, a railroad porter who fought for the rights of Negro Pullman porters; the Civil Rights Movement; the Black Panther Party; the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. Then there are the efforts of hundreds of thousands of individual African Americans and organizations struggling for a humane and just existence for our people. Many European Americans, as

⁴³ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “Nat Turner’s Insurrection,” in The Nat Turner Rebellion: The Historical Event and the Modern Controversy, ed. John B. Duff and Peter M. Mitchell (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 52-63.

well as persons of other racial/ethnic identities, have given their efforts and their lives for these freedoms. Many of these freedom fighters exist as unsung heroes; and many have been heralded as heroes. Nonetheless, all efforts have been toward the fight against oppression, injustice, and racism. It is the understanding of many that freedom for one means freedom for all.

Being at a stage in my own life/faith journey at which I and other African Americans of my generation are being confronted with the deaths of the elders within the communities from which we hail, it has become increasingly clear that we are at risk of losing something of significant value in terms of who we are as people, of losing our roots. Sociologist Orlando Patterson, Harvard, has coined the term

“natal alienation,” that is, alienated from all “rights” or claims of birth. He ceased to belong in his own right to any social order.... Not only was the slave denied all claims on, and obligations to his parents and living blood relations but by extension, all such claims and obligations on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants.⁴⁴

It is apparent as well that each generation of persons will become the elders of our families, our communities, and our churches. We are responsible as the carriers of wisdom for the generations succeeding us. What are the convictions upon which our foreparents stood? Has each generation done adequate tasks of making the connections, of reconnecting to our roots? James William McClendon, Jr., suggests that convictions are integral to the existence of community and may be that necessary missing element that links theology and self identity. McClendon opines,

We may roughly define convictions as those tenacious beliefs, which when held, give definiteness to the character of a person or of a community, so that if they were surrendered, the person or community would be significantly changed....While convictions are very often particular and immediate in

⁴⁴ Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5.

form, and may not be consciously formulated by their holders at all, yet when we do find our convictions, we find the best clue to ourselves.⁴⁵

This place in my life/faith journey compels me to reflect upon my own identity in terms of value systems, how I experience and how I function in relationship to God, self and others. As I drink from my own well, I am amazed at its depth and at the strength of the convictions derived from my life and my relationships which allow me to plumb the depths of my own well and draw upon the resources that enrich my life. If we have not heard, if we have not witnessed, if we have not touched, then from whence is to come the word of life that is the essence of a viable, meaningful life for the African American? From within this context, there are several questions that arise for me: Am I indeed being intentional and concrete in transmitting tradition and values, in imparting wisdom, knowledge and understanding to succeeding generations? What is my legacy as an heiress of these resources? What is my responsibility or ethical concern to my community as an African American?

Scope and Limitations of the Dissertation

It is important to note that this construction of African thought systems has not been done systematically; that would necessarily entail some attention to the many different African peoples, which is beyond the scope of this research. This construction purports to reflect the wholism, mobility, fluidity, endlessness and way of knowing that characterize African thought. This construction also purports to reflect an African theory of the self in that the person or self is not juxtaposed with the outside world, which includes other persons and other things, but is in fact, interactive and continuous with other persons and other things.

⁴⁵ James W. McClendon, Jr., Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's

This construction is undertaken from the perspective of Christian pastoral theology, which is my personal religious orientation. However, that fact is not to preclude viability of this construct for the many religious orientations of Africans and African Americans: for example, the religion of Islam, African Traditional Religion, as well as Atheism that prevails within the African American community. The precepts and concepts of those religions would dictate the process of emergence from the basic underpinnings of the theory and theology espoused here.

Audience

These reflections and questions provide the impetus and motivation for this dissertation. My hope and intention is that this work serve as a means of information and inspiration to the broad spectrum of African Americans who seek personal healing and wholeness as well as to African American pastoral counselors, pastoral psychotherapists, pastors and other caregivers in particular, as they seek to transform lives and heal within African American communities. My own experience as a pastoral psychotherapist informs me that the theory and therapy explicated in this work can serve as a base for healing and care for persons of diverse cultures and by diverse caregivers.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation begins with the premise that any theory and model of treatment for healing and care of African Americans must emerge from African thought systems. There are fundamental differences in the social and psychological realities of Africans and Europeans which define one's way of being in the world. Hence, theories and models of treatment must be commensurate with each reality in order for survival, healing and liberation to occur. Chapter 1 sets the context for the argumentation for such

a theory and pastoral theology to exist in African American communities. I give some attention to the environment in which Africans were first brought to the colonies in America as well as to the direction of theory construction in Black psychological literature.

In Chapter 2, an exploration of the literature and research done on the development of the concept of self in African Americans is undertaken. Explicit and implicit in this literature are themes of violence and violation that characterize what it means to be African American in the United States. This chapter sets a conceptual framework for understanding the impact that a culture of racism and violation, as it exists in the United States, makes upon a sense of self for the African American with implications for care and healing. In this chapter, I assess and critique, as well, published works in pastoral care and counseling that specifically address models of care in the African American community.

Chapter 3 consists of an explication of an African worldview and the influences of that worldview on the values, customs and beliefs of that world. Focus is given to African ontology and the evolution of that ontology within slave culture, with some emphasis on the ingenuity of the slave's creation of techniques for survival and sustenance. Finally, the extraction of models of care inherent within the slave culture that provided sustenance and the evolution of those models of care to African American society today will be explored.

Chapter 4 involves an interweaving of African self theory and the implicit self theory that emerged within slave culture toward the construction of self theory that is

viable for African Americans today. A Black theology of pastoral care and counseling emerges from this exploration as well.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter of the dissertation, explicates the themes of healing and care inherent in this model of care as well as gives implications for health and wholeness within the context of pastoral care and counseling.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF CONCEPT IN AFRICAN AMERICANS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Humankind has always sought to understand the causes of behavior, and that quest has often been posited within the context of religious thought. Within that context, humankind is considered to have an inner agent, “will,” or “nature” that responds to a supernatural force and influences destiny. With the advent of scientific “self-psychology,” however, the hypothetical construct of self-concept is the antecedent for individual responses. That is, “the feelings and beliefs one holds about oneself motivate one’s conduct.”¹

Research into the development of the self-concept has shown it to be the result of, as well as concomitant with, the other developmental aspects of personhood. Psychologists are uncertain about the specific factors and the degree to which prenatal influences shape the developmental direction of the self-concept. They are more certain about the role of feedback that one receives from one’s social environment as a critical factor in molding his/her eventual self-image.²

The social environment of African Americans in the 1960s can be deemed as explosive at best. Black protest was at its height, focusing on legal discrimination in the South, systemic racism throughout the country, and on racial prejudices as well. Cobbs and Grier,³ two African American psychiatrists, describe and explain a state of

¹Wallace D. LaBenne and Bert I. Greene, Educational Implications of Self-Concept Theory (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing, 1969), 2.

²Franklin T. Wise, “Some Implications of the Self-Concept for Christian Education,” Journal of Psychology and Theology 1 (January 1973): 66-75.

³Grier and Cobbs, xi.

psychological rage in African Americans as a consequence of domination and oppression, a rage that is often internalized and acted out in self-destructive patterns. However, this same rage is seen as the source of patterns of aggressive behavior acted out upon society as well, particularly by African American males. Their work was to serve as a clinical handbook as well. They found that there were very few resources available to clinicians serving African American clients and who were being trained in the field.

Availability of Literature on Self Concept and Black Child Development

The scope of this exploration is broad in that it is cursory. It is limited in that this search in professional journals refers to those articles and studies on black child development that are published in psychological journals only, as opposed to other social science fields, such as psychiatry, sociology, anthropology as well as education journals. However, the books that were engaged in this study scan the social science fields. I located four extensive bibliographies of psychological research in Africa: one exclusively on children in Africa, the other three, on the general population, including children, that have been done by British and French researchers. Collectively, these works spanned the period from 1900 to 1970. Two of the bibliographies contained reviews of the research as well.⁴ I viewed one extensive bibliography and review of research on black child development in America spanning the period from 1927 to 1977. I focused on one book, published in 1985,⁵ with a range of fifteen African American researchers contributing

⁴ Frederic Wickert, ed. Readings in African Psychology from French Language Sources (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1967); S. H. Irvine, J. T. Sanders, and E. L. Klingelhofer Human Behavior in Africa: A Bibliography of Psychological and Related Writings (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973); Judith L. Evans, Children in Africa: A Review of Psychological Research (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970); Hector F. Myers, Phyllis G. Rana, and Marcia Harris, comp., Black Child Development in America, 1927-1977 (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

⁵ Margaret B. Spencer, Geraldine K. Brookins, Walter R. Allen, eds. Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985).

essays on black children and families in America. I found this particular work significant because it is research done from an African American perspective, specifically. It is purported that this work reflects a more pluralist or even separatist stance than that of earlier scholars.⁶ None of these bibliographies is exhaustive, although they do reflect a large body of work in this area.

Literature on self concept of African Americans is extensive. A computerized search limited to psychological abstracts of journals alone from 1974 to 1999 yielded over 3500 articles. There has been a proliferation of research on the self over the past two decades by clinical, developmental, educational and social psychologists as well as by other social scientists. Also, these contemporary efforts to study the self vary dramatically in their scope and their methodology. Primarily, this variance can be attributed to wide disagreement among social scientists about how to define the self, measure it, and study its development. Therefore, many difficulties arise when the researcher attempts to integrate the different theoretical, methodological, and developmental perspectives. One such difficulty can be attributed to the fact that this research has not occurred within the structure of a particular discipline.

Historical Context of Self Concept Theory

The derivation of much of the contemporary theorizing about self concept can be attributed to William James, who began his writings on the self near the turn of the twentieth century. James raised critical issues at that time for the researcher, which are just as critical today. For example, what are the characteristics and dimensions of the self? How best should the self be measured? What are the effects of the self on a

⁶ Spencer, Brookins, and Allen, xv.

person's motivations, behaviors, and processing of information?⁷ It is this latter question that focuses the scope of this examination.

Since the advent of psychology as an official discipline and science of human behavior in 1860, self concept has had cyclic resurgence.⁸ A number of notable theorists began to establish their concepts of self after James' writings. Much of this work was theorizing about self concept characteristics as a function of age and developmental levels, e. g., Allport, Piaget, Inhelder, Sullivan and Erikson.⁹ All, including James, used the term "self" to have one of three meanings: (1) a dynamic process, which incorporates the cognition processes, i.e., perceiving, interpreting, thinking, remembering; (2) a system of awareness, which denotes the objectified form of awareness an individual gives to his/her feelings, evaluations, and beliefs about him/herself; or (3) an interrelated process and awareness, which gives the body of awareness a psychodynamic quality in terms of its effect upon what is perceived and how this perception is interpreted, and thus how human behavior and learning is interpreted.¹⁰ Kenneth Gergen cites, summarily, earlier theorists and their work.¹¹ Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, being one such theorist, emphasized strongly the relationship between self and social environment.¹² George Herbert Mead later expanded this view, positing that the child observes and imitates the behavior of significant others around him. Inasmuch as these others behave

⁷ Thomas M. Brinthaup and Richard P. Lipka, eds. The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1, citing William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1890), 1:183-98.

⁸ LaBenne and Greene, 2.

⁹ Gordon Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); Harry Stack Sullivan, Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry (Washington, DC: W. A. White Psychiatric Foundation, 1947); Erik Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: Norton, 1980).

¹⁰ LaBenne and Green, 2-8.

¹¹ Kenneth J. Gergen, The Concept of Self (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971).

¹² Charles Horton Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

in certain ways toward the child, the child begins to adopt these orientations toward him/her.¹³ Mead's theory was later tested through scientific methodology, i.e., correlational techniques, with the result that the subjects' self ratings were strongly correlated with the ratings of the significant others. This early research stimulated considerable activity, which contributed to the cyclic resurgence of the literature. Many social scientists deemed that these correlational studies did not demonstrate a sound causal connection between others' views toward self and self-conception.¹⁴ Researcher Ruth C. Wylie makes the case that, in later research,

alternate hypothetical arguments have been developed from Meadian, Sullivanian, and more modern reference-group theories. According to these arguments, racial/ethnic status should either be minimally related to over-all self-regard, or perhaps the self-regard of blacks might be expected to exceed that of whites.

While the earlier theories took for granted that the dominant white majority comprised the "significant others" whose values and reflected appraisals determined the self-regard and other aspects of self-concept in racial/ethnic groups, several recent writers have thought this assumption simplistic.¹⁵

Harry Stack Sullivan's writings were published primarily between 1936 and his death in 1949. Sullivan was a pioneer in wedding the dynamism of psychiatry with social science. He valued highly the influence of the social setting, the cultural milieu, on how one makes meaning for oneself. He considered it a strong influence, as well, in the shaping of personality. Given the text of violence and abuse inherent in the historical reality of the African American, Sullivan's view of one's context can lend to an understanding of the African American self as will be seen in Chapter 4.

¹³ George H. Mead, Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

¹⁴ Gergen, 5-7.

¹⁵ Ruth C. Wylie, The Self-Concept, vol. 2, Theory and Research on Selected Topics, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 124.

Trends

The investigation of the development of the self concept in African Americans parallels certain societal trends. During the 1920s, as a result of mass immigration, a great deal of concern was focused on the differential assimilation of non-White groups into the population. In the field of psychology, in particular, much attention was given to comparative analyses of physical characteristics between African Americans and European Americans. In the 1930s, the migration of African Americans to northern urban centers was reflected in a proliferation of studies in eugenics and the nature-nurture controversy of minority intellectual performance. The subsequent rise of the Civil Rights Movement focused more on the psychodynamics of prejudice toward the African American. As the Black Power and Pan African Movements took hold, the trend was toward more positive psychological consequences of African American racial identity and group membership. Finally there were those studies of psychological and attitudinal effects of desegregation on African American children, which were spawned by the Supreme Court Decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954.

Methodological and Theoretical Concerns and Issues

A major complaint of the reviewers of social scientists' research on the subject of self-concept has been that many of the self-concept studies lacked sophistication in theory, measurement, or methodology. For example, Wylie, a frequent reviewer of a large body of such research, states, "many different instruments have been employed, the majority of them only once or twice, and little or no information on reliability and construct validity is available for a great many of these measures."¹⁶

¹⁶ Ruth C. Wylie, The Self Concept: A Critical Survey of Pertinent Research Literature (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 114.

Brinthaupt and Lipka edit a work on the critical issues which surround this topic. A brief summary of their findings follows. A major theoretical concern stems from the definition of self. How is “self” defined? An issue that arises for the researchers is the distinction between the descriptive and evaluative components of self. How is the distinction made in the research? How are our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about ourselves related to one another?

A second issue is, what is the distinction between self-as-subject and self-as-object? That is, what is the difference between the *I* and the *me* – the *I* being self as knower, and the *me* being self as known. A third issue is the question of change versus stability of self. Is there a stable core or is the self a product or reflection of situational and contextual variants?

Rene L’Ecuyer illustrates that how we define the self affects the methodology and instrumentation one uses. If operational definitions are not clearly made at the outset of the research project, future modifications may be impossible if those earlier choices are inadequate. L’Ecuyer states, “...the researcher may discover too late that the development of the selected dimension could be better understood in light of one or several other dimensions or ...he or she may tend to consider the obtained curve as the standard curve characterizing the development of the entire self. A multidimensional approach clearly shows there are no standard developmental curves but, rather, several different patterns depending on the dimension considered.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Rene L’Ecuyer, “An Experiential-Developmental Framework and Methodology to Study the Transformation of the Self-Concept from Infancy to Old Age,” in The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues, ed. Thomas Brinthaupt and Richard Lipka (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 96-134.

While there is a plethora of theoretical, methodological, and developmental issues plaguing the research on self concept in general, research done on self concept with African Americans as subjects has its unique set of issues as well. It is important to note that these studies vary in quality in terms of the criteria for empirical studies. Myers, Rana and Harris deem the earlier studies of the 1920s to the 1950s as poor quality, both theoretically and methodologically: questions were simplified and poorly structured, yet sweeping conclusions about the subjects were drawn.¹⁸ A scan of this literature reveals a basic question consistent within this research around the influence of heredity versus environment. Are children born with racial feelings and attitudes or do they learn what color they are and what color is “best?” Moreover, the studies on African American subjects’ deficits are generally posited within the context of standards for European Americans.

Research in Africa

In order to avoid reflecting colonially-influenced thinking, though some work during the colonial period in Africa is included, the compilers of the bibliographies on research done in Africa garnered their selections of research from that which was done after many countries in Africa gained independence. According to Wickert, the work during the colonial period in Africa is included to provide the African student with a better historical perspective.¹⁹ Needless to say, within a European dominated colonial environment, certain stereotypes and biases would be prevalent.

It is important to note that two parallel research traditions exist in African research in psychology, francophone (French-speaking) and anglophone (English-speaking).

¹⁸ Myers, Rana, and Harris, introduction, xiv.

¹⁹ Wickert, preface, iii.

These traditions are distinguishable by the theoretical predilections of the researcher, the psychological problem domains of special interest and the characteristic methods of inquiry. In the Anglophone tradition, the most enduring work has been the work of the British psychometricians, whose psychometry and ability theory have been closely allied with the broad problem domains of educational and occupational selection and placement. The francophone tradition reflects a focal interest in affective variables and clinical psychiatric phenomena of human personality. The major theoretical orientation reflects the concepts that make up the medical-psychiatric model. There is a reliance upon idiographic data, e. g., the clinical interview, case study, etc. Therefore, a francophone entry would contain descriptive data, while the Anglophone entry would contain psychometric data. One would need to be aware of these distinctions as the coding in the geographic index of the bibliographies indicates the tradition in which the reference originates.

According to Irvine and Sanders,²⁰ the francophone tradition has a holistic orientation which characterizes it and seems to have compelled psychologists to attempt to understand the cultural determinants of human behavior in Africa to a greater degree than required by the Anglophone tradition. However, even within this tradition, in its holistic approach, there exists throughout these studies, within the hypotheses and methodologies, a comparative aspect to European standards and norms.

For example, in describing the thought processes of Africans, Lucien Levy-Bruhl

²⁰ S. H. Irvine and J. T. Sanders, "Psychology in Africa: Its Character and Identity," in Human Behavior in Africa: A Bibliography of Psychological and Related Writings, comp. S. H. Irvine, J. T. Sanders, and E. L. Klingelhofer (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), vii-xvii.

used the term “prelogical mentality,”²¹ positing that Western thought is dependent on logical activity, while “prelogical” characterizes processes in primitive societies which are dependent on memory. Levy-Bruhl’s position generated much discussion among researchers; however, both those who supported and disputed his position used his work as foundation for later articles. According to Evans, many studies on the African child were done through tests developed in Western cultures, administered in the manner in which they would be to European children, and then compared with Western norms. She further states that the trend in the late 1920s was to hypothesize about the causes of the African’s poor test results.²² This pattern is reflected in the work of M. Lawrence Fick, among numerous others, whose work was in the area of intelligence testing. Because of the Africans’ lower scores when compared with lower class white Afrikaners, Fick’s conclusion was that the differences were the result of innate inferiority and not a temporary phenomenon.²³ Though Fick’s work was heavily criticized by later researchers who supported an environmentalist theory, it stood on its own merit for a number of years. Researchers had their own philosophical approaches to the African mind. Research results were often disputed based on the researcher’s belief about whether the environment or cultural evolution produced physiological changes that affect the mind. Evans reviews a book, Primitive Philosophy, in which the author concludes

that the different philosophies of life in primitive societies are not a result of any peculiar mental process of function, since the African mind functions in the same way as the Western mind. Instead, different thought systems are the results of customs and traditions produced by and perpetuating the existing social and political system. In an analysis of African philosophy, Brelsford

²¹ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Primitive Mentality, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen and Unwin; New York: Macmillan Co., 1923).

²² Evans, 3-4.

²³ Evans, 10-11.

showed that the African sees himself as part of a total system which includes other individuals as well as spirits and things, and he accepts the universe rather than challenging it. The mind is molded by its surroundings; the surroundings are not changed by the individual.²⁴

The body of literature on child development in Africa is diverse in its range of research topics. The volume of the work itself attests to a considerable interest in psychology in Africa. As the European's foray into the continent of Africa expanded, it would follow that the need to understand that land and its people would arise. There were many among the researchers who believed and emphasized in their work that to understand a particular people, one must be aware of the philosophical and metaphysical foundations of their culture, e. g., Lienhardt, Tempels et al.²⁵ There were also those who advocated the use of western tests on peoples of other cultures to measure specifically the skills necessary to adjust to western society.

The following excerpt, which was written for Europeans who were or planned to become supervisors of African laborers, reflects the kind of stereotypical views which still abound and abide for Africans in Africa and in the Diaspora today. R. Durand penned the following:

The African, always bubbling over with human warmth hardly conceives of work independently of other men. He does not willingly distinguish between the work which he is ordered to do and the man who commands him to do it. He applies himself more to satisfying his boss than to doing a task with any exactness. As long as the two objectives coincide, everything is all right. But if an on-the-job error leads his boss to scold him a short time after he has encouraged him, he considers himself the victim of an unexplainable caprice. He believes himself to be betrayed. He will suffer or, he even will revolt. The employer, if he is a European, will not see it this way at all, having

²⁴ Evans, 5, citing William Vernon Brelsford, Primitive Philosophy (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1935).

²⁵R. Godfrey Lienhardt, Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961); Placide Tempels, Bantu Philosophy (Paris: Pre'sence Africaine, 1959).

been content to objectively rate a job whether it is well done or poorly done, and correspondingly to give rewards or punishments without caring about the worker as a person.²⁶

Research in the United States

Though these studies were fraught with ambiguities and complexities, significant work emerged within the field during this time, e.g., the pioneering work of Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark, which examined the development of racial awareness and racial preferences in African American children.²⁷ In their initial investigations, the Clarks used pictures of African American and European children and posed questions such as, “Which one is you?” Inferences were made about the choosers’ evaluative feelings toward his/her own racial identity or race. The validity of the instrument itself lends to certain ambiguities in what were deemed “incorrect” choices. The choices were deemed “incorrect” when the subjects of the study, after positively indicating a skin color difference, i.e. he’s white, he’s colored, consistently chose “white boy” when asked, “Which one is you?” Perhaps the “incorrect” choices could be attributed to other factors, i.e., inability to understand the task, the abstractness of pictures as compared to more concrete objects. Later studies done by the Clarks incorporated the use of dolls instead of pictures. Wylie does a more comprehensive analysis of the earlier doll studies. In Wylie’s review of the methods used to study the development of racial awareness and identity in African American children, she notes that several issues have emerged as to the validity of results obtained; one fundamental issue being, whether the concept of race

²⁶ R. Durand, “Personalizing,” in Readings in African Psychology from French Language Sources ed. Frederic Wickert (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1967), 166. Editor’s note: from page 90, Formation et adaptation professionnelle du jeune africain Le Travail Humain, 1960, 23 (1-2).

²⁷ Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark, “Skin Color as a Factor in Racial Identification of Negro Preschool Children,” Journal of Social Psychology 11, no. 2 (1940): 159-69.

as a general social category can function as the basis for the test for attitudes and awareness, when “race” is not necessarily a known concept among preschool children. Reviewers suggest that the concept of racial awareness and racial attitudes and identity be teased apart so that each aspect is studied in its own right. Generally, the outcome of the studies reflected that preschool African American children tended to reject and devalue their own group and to select European American models. Wylie lists other issues concerning doll studies that must be addressed, i.e., there must be a more sophisticated knowledge about the concept of “race;” evaluative attitudes toward racial groups, one’s own and others’ should exist among researchers; one must have a cognitive sense of one’s own racial identity; and must present an evaluation of oneself, as this is dependent on one’s sense of racial identity.²⁸

These doll studies continue to be replicated by many researchers, yielding a variety of results. While the earlier studies have been designed on the basis of deficit models, later studies have been better designed and more complex questions are posed; nevertheless, the issues cited above remain.²⁹

A concern that is noted consistently by reviewers and researchers throughout this body of literature, particularly African American reviewers, is that social scientists too often use a frame of reference that has been developed out of one cultural experience base and, without correction, impose it onto another in interpreting behavior of persons in that group. When these universalized theories of dominant culture norms are applied to African Americans, the differences have been historically interpreted as deviant, without

²⁸ Wylie, Self Concept, vol. 2, Theory and Research on Selected Topics, 119-60.

²⁹ Myra N. Burnett and Kimberly Sisson, “Doll Studies Revisited: A Question of Validity,” Journal of Black Psychology 21, no. 1 (1995): 19-29.

raising the questions of cultural bias, ethnocentrism, or inappropriate norms. White asserts,

In their attempt to explain what they considered to be “universal human phenomena,” Euro-American psychologists implicitly and explicitly began to establish a normative standard of behavior against which all other cultural groups would be measured. What emerged as normal or abnormal, sane or insane, relevant or irrelevant, was always in comparison to how closely a particular thought or behavior paralleled that of white Europeans and/or European Americans. For many white social scientists and psychologists, the word “different” when applied to people, became synonymous with “deficient,” rather than simply different.³⁰

Although this scientific research requires points of reference that are assumed to be normative, the social scientists who fall into this category reify the concept of norms by making them objective and immutable facts. Myers, Rana, and Harris define norms as “convenient and pragmatic points of reference that represent particular societal values, ideologies, and social praxes.”³¹ To persist in the practice of defining behavior for African Americans exclusively in terms of White norms perpetuates the mystification and idealization of the European American norm. This practice excludes the posing of pertinent questions to arrive at what would be normative for African Americans.

In Black Psychology

Because of the pervasiveness of the practice of defining African American behaviors in terms of White norms in scientific research, beginning in the 1930s, African American social scientists, clinicians and graduate students began to take an activist stance against this trend, however, their efforts were of little avail due to their sparsity in number and the overwhelming tide of institutionalized racism in the field. It was not

³⁰ Joseph L. White and Thomas A. Parham, The Psychology of Blacks: An African-American Perspective, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990) 4.

³¹ Myers, Rana, Harris, introduction, xiv.

until the 1960s that the modern era of Black Psychology began.³² The studies of that time suggest that the major political upheaval of the 1950s and 1970s had marked positive effects on this particular area of development of self concept in Africans Americans. The evidence, primarily in studies on self esteem, suggests that African American children tend to prefer and embrace rather than reject their own group. Several longitudinal studies have borne out these results regarding personality and social development during adolescence and adulthood.³³ Studies performed in the late 1940s and 1950s reflect the perception that African Americans are aware of the contradiction between ideals of freedom, equality, and justice and the status of the African American in a racially segregated society. The studies also indicate patterns of aggressive behavior, which is attributed to low esteem of self.

There are errors that pervade this research, and which Myers, Rana and Harris discuss thematically: (1) the utility of “standardized” measures as primary tools of investigations. For these researchers, this represents a specialized form of the Black-White comparison paradigm. The rationale for this practice is that there is the need for comparability of results and for a standard reference in order to insure consistency in the interpretation of findings. The authors state, “One runs the risk of committing the error of scientific arrogance when the phenomena are forced to fit the tools rather than having the tools fit the phenomena;”³⁴ (2) the assumption that difference equals deficiency. Their argument goes on to say that researchers have interpreted deviations in African

³² Joseph L. White, The Psychology of Blacks: An African American Perspective (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

³³ Myers, Rana, Harris, introduction, xiii.

³⁴ Myers, Rana, Harris, introduction, xv.

American performances with no reasonable expectation that, given the historical experience of oppression of African Americans in the United States, deficiencies are likely to exist within this group; and (3) the myth of African American homogeneity and the normativeness of the African American poor. A consistent practice noted within the research is a comparison of behavior of low-income African American children to that of middle-income European American children. The researchers point out two major errors here: one, it confounds social class with race; and two, it perpetuates the implicit assumption that the behavior and characteristics of the African American lower class are normative and that it represents behavior in African Americans. They conclude their discussion with the acknowledgment that this body of research is fraught with biases, imprecision, and generalized conclusions, however, they do not advocate that it be discarded. It can at least serve as stimulation to a more unbiased tackling of the complex issues in this field.

More recently African American researchers reiterate the fact that there exists a core African philosophy that should be the basis for a Black psychology. Nobles' work is foundational in the Africentric psychology movement. Several African American psychologists are part of this movement and have contributed research and theories that have enhanced the evolution of the movement in significant ways. I have explicated Kambon's work in Chapter 1. Psychologist Linda Myers makes the case that the unity and integration of knowledge that is sought in transpersonal psychology is existent already in traditional African culture, worldview and Africentric psychological theory and proposes directions for further research.³⁵ An implication derived from the earlier

³⁵ Linda J. Myers, "Transpersonal Psychology," 8.

works is that alternative methodologies and theoretical conceptualizations must be introduced into the area of scientific research in order to include those segments of our population about whom informed study must be done. Spencer, Brookins and Allen³⁶ offer a collection of essays by a wide range of social scientists, i.e., psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, and historians, which indeed does offer alternative approaches both to the study of development in African Americans and to the interpretation of outcomes. The later critiques and analyses state unequivocally that social researchers and theorists need to consider development in the African American as it is influenced by socio-historical, cultural, life course and ecological imperatives. Interestingly, one essayist, John Ogbu,³⁷ addresses the context of the inner city environment as the lens through which interpersonal competence and school achievement among African Americans can be studied effectively. Slaughter and McWorter, in their essay, critique a body of work done on Black child development from 1934 to 1970. Their conclusions coincide, generally, with those of other reviewers, i.e., "it was assumed that an optimally functioning black family would function precisely like the white middle class family. If it did not, it was (a) deviant, even pathological, in orientation and (b) likely to produce children with defective personalities"³⁸

A body of work is currently emerging which focuses specifically on the African American male, again reflecting major societal issues of the time. The status of the African American male in society is deemed critical, with increase in number of those

³⁶ See Spencer, Brookins, and Allen, Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children, (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985).

³⁷ John Ogbu, "A Cultural Ecology of Competence among Inner City Blacks," in Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children, 45-66.

³⁸ Diana T. Slaughter and Gerald McWorter, "Social Origins Are Early Features of the Scientific Study of Black American Families and Children," in Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children, 12.

unemployed, incarcerated, and with health issues. More research is being done and is being called for in areas such as male-headed families, nondeviant African American males, roles of husbands/fathers in intact families, and roles of the lower class urban husband/father.

Literature on the development of the black child in America is voluminous as well. This literature reflects racist attitudes toward blacks that skewed the scientific research done by western researchers. Wade Nobles believes that this failure of western psychologists arises out of not only a legacy of basic assumptions but from a “narrow perception of what it means to be human.”³⁹ Robert Guthrie, in his book, Even the Rat was White, points out that western psychologists not only provided inaccurate data that led to racist conclusions, but that their behavior and their conduct make suspect the motivation and intent of their research.⁴⁰ In a scan of this literature, there continues to be disagreement around the influence of heredity versus environment as determinants of intellectual ability. Myers, Rana and Harris report that researcher J. Price shows studies that blacks lag behind whites in weight from birth to early infancy. Later, their weight exceeds the whites and even later, during mid-adolescence, blacks lag behind again. J. Price hypothesizes that the difference in growth may explain the differences in achievement.⁴¹ Myers, Rana, and Harris opine that this perspective gives rise to a “voluminous body of research that essentially defines the black child as an inadequate version of the white child.”⁴²

³⁹ Wade Nobles, African Psychology (Oakland, CA: Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, 1986), 2.

⁴⁰ Robert Guthrie, Even the Rat was White: A Historical View of Psychology (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

⁴¹ Myers, Rana, and Harris, 177, citing J. Price, “Negro-White Differences in Intelligence,” Opportunity 7 (1929) 341-43.

⁴² Myers, Rana, and Harris, introduction, xii.

Myers, Rana and Harris cite researcher M. T. Erickson's critique of researcher W. A. Kennedy who suggests a study of the role of environmental variables by placing illegitimate Negro children into middle class Negro homes at birth, later comparing IQ and achievement scores with lower class Negro and white children. Erickson criticizes Kennedy's premise on the basis that heredity cannot be attributed as the cause of test score differences.⁴³

Perhaps for the African American, some attention need be paid to ancient African thought, thought that arises out of the derivative culture of the African American. To be human is to possess "will" or "nature" that responds to a supernatural force, which, in African thought, is universal spirit and is indeed divine. Human beings are innately endowed with the capacity to grow, to transform. Natural functioning arises out of being centered in and being consistent with oneself. However, reality for African Americans is defined by cultural prerequisites of the west, which are not consistent with African thought systems.

The acculturation and assimilation processes have removed African Americans further and further away from any semblance of ancient African reality. Rather, African Americans, generally, internalize a reality that defines one as inferior, is violent and abusive, and impedes the ability to grow, to transform, and to develop a strong sense of self. Western psychology has basically left the African American with tools that distort an understanding of African American reality. Western psychology has used science as a tool to further its imperial and colonial perspectives.

⁴³ Myers, Rana, and Harris, 114, citing M. T. Erickson, "Intelligence: Prenatal and Preconception Environmental Influences," Science 157 (1967).

Nobles believes that African (black) psychology is rooted in African American culture, which derives from African cosmology. In order for African psychology to reascend, therefore, those roots have to be reclaimed. For Nobles,

Black culture in the United States is the result of a special mixture of our continued African orientation operating within another cultural milieu which is primarily defined by the philosophical assumptions and underpinnings of the Anglo-American community. Accordingly, it is that African perspective which is at the base of the Black cultural sphere. Similarly, it is the continuation of that African worldview which is at the root of the special features in Black life styles. It is the continuation of the African orientation which, in part, helps to define the “general design for living and the patterns for interpreting reality” for, or characteristic of, Black people.⁴⁴

Nobles is recognizing the African American worldview, which has the institution of slavery, segregation and racism as its context, as a necessary part of the reclamation of African psychology. Nobles further states,

Remembering that at the core of what we call “science” is a particular world-view, set of assumptions and referential frame, it is also important to note that things combine to form a scientific paradigm, which guides the assessment and evaluation of reality. A paradigm is, therefore, a perceptual, cognitive and affective process for understanding. The process becomes the single screen through which all else is filtered.⁴⁵

Nobles extracts “guiding principles” from traditional African belief system, i.e., “ontologically, the African belief system understood that the nature of all things in the universe was ‘force’ or ‘spirit.’ It is logical, or at least consistent; therefore, that in believing that all things, including man, were endowed with the same Supreme Force, one would also believe that all things are ‘essentially’ one....The traditional African view of self is contingent upon the actual existence of others.”⁴⁶ Therefore, Nobles’ first guiding principle is that African peoples believe themselves to be “one with nature.” The

⁴⁴ Wade Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*, 54.

⁴⁵ Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*, 73.

⁴⁶ Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*, 55.

second guiding principle, “survival of the tribe,” suggests that “African peoples believe in the cosmological and ontological importance of life, which, in turn, suggests that life never ends.”⁴⁷

Linda Myers and Wade Nobles are among the many African American social science theorists who articulate a concept of self that arises out of African cosmology. Both psychologists agree that an appropriate understanding of an African American concept of self must be based on African assumptions, incorporating African conceptualizations and analyses.⁴⁸ The African belief system holds and shapes the African concept of self.

While Nobles’ work on the self tends to focus more on an analysis of colonialism, as it pertains to the social science fields, i.e., psychology, anthropology, and the effects of that colonialism on the scientific investigation of the Black self concept, he makes a general case for understanding the differences between African and Western worldviews. For Africans in the diaspora, which includes the United States, health and wholeness do not inhere in Western worldviews, where psychological models, theories and concepts are considered normative for all cultures. Nobles terms the African self concept as the extended-self, the transcendent relationship between self and kind. Nobles bases this concept on the traditional African conception of self: *I am because We are, and because We are, therefore I am*. This saying connotes the interrelatedness, interdependence, the

⁴⁷ Wade Nobles, “Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self-Concept,” Journal of Black Psychology 2, no. 2 (1976): 20

⁴⁸ Linda Myers’ thesis is that the literature of transpersonal psychology has not reflected an exploration of traditional African culture and worldview. However, the unity and integration of knowledge sought in transpersonal psychology is existent and identifiable in Africentric psychological theory.

Nobles’ work is more apologetic for the necessity of African cosmology as foundational for African American psychological theory; he debunks Western psychology, naming it a tool of oppression and dominance in its investigation of African American self-conception.

oneness of being.⁴⁹ The permeable and pliable boundaries that exist between the material and spiritual worlds in African cosmology characterize as well the concept of the extended-self.

Myers posits her theory within the realm of transpersonal psychology delineating African culture and worldview as a heretofore missing element in the literature of transpersonal psychology. Myers states in her article,

Transpersonal psychology represents a paradigm shift in Western psychology, benefiting from exposure to cross-cultural beliefs about the nature of consciousness and reality. Changing the prevailing limiting cultural beliefs about our basic nature and our relationship to the world may be one of the most important tasks confronting psychology today. Recognition of the upper reaches of psychological development supports the investigation of maximal positive well-being and higher states of consciousness. This awareness has always been characteristic of non-Western psychologies.... One of the principle aims of transpersonal psychology must be to help us overcome the perceptual distortions identified by the many consciousness disciplines, yielding a view of reality more consistent with that which modern physics has shown to be the true nature of the material universe.⁵⁰

Nobles explicates his theory of self as based on “guiding principles” of African cosmology; Myers defines her Africentric paradigm with “conceptual categories” of African philosophical tradition. Myers posits that a set of categories have been generated by African worldviews and traditional African culture, each category representing a philosophical assumption that comprises the conceptual system. Overall, these categories formulate the basis of the paradigm. Addressing ontology, which is one of the conceptual categories, Myers’ paradigm assumes a reality that is both spiritual and material at the same time. In this reality, everything becomes one thing, a manifestation of spirit, which

⁴⁹ Nobles, “Extended Self,” 15-24.

⁵⁰ Linda Myers, 5.

Myers refers to as “a permeating essence that is known in an extrasensory fashion (e.g., energy, consciousness, God).”⁵¹ Myers states further,

This deification process seeks to transform the finite, limited conception of human consciousness into an infinite consciousness that is supremely good or divine. In order to accomplish this task, one must begin to know that everything, including self, is the manifestation of one permeating essence that is the source of all things good. When the spiritual/material ontology is adhered to completely, one loses the sense of individualized ego/mind and experiences infinite mind or consciousness manifesting as oneself. Remember that any other ontological assumption (e.g., material, or material and spiritual) falls within the realm of nonreality or illusion to one adopting the Afrocentric conceptual system.⁵²

Myers’ second conceptual category is epistemology. Within this category, all knowledge is assumed to be self knowledge, that is, it forms the basis of all knowledge. Myers states, “the Afrocentric epistemology starts out assuming the interrelatedness of all things and that whatever you believe is, is for you, given your conceptual system (interplay of subsidiary and focal awareness). Power in this worldview is the ability to define reality. So then, Afrocentric ontology and Afrocentric epistemology comprise the conceptual categories, and are the bases of the paradigm.”⁵³

Myers’ conceptual categories and Nobles’ guiding principles are indeed one and the same. The source from which the categories and principles emerge is used to illustrate the theoretical formulations.

Similarities emerge in Nobles’ concept of the extended-self and Myers concept of the transcendent self to noted Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s concept of the transcendent function. The primary difference between the African American theorists, Myers and Nobles and European theorist Jung abide essentially in the worldviews of

⁵¹ Linda Myers, 9.

⁵² Linda Myers, 9-10.

⁵³ Linda Myers, 11.

each. European worldview emphasizes individuality, uniqueness, differences, and survival of the fittest; African worldview, emphasizes groupness, sameness, commonality, and survival of the tribe. The European worldview values competition, independence; the African worldview values cooperation, collective responsibility and interdependence. These distinctions must be noted in order to understand African self concept, given the derivation of Africentric theory.

Jung defines the *self* as “the total personality, which, though present, cannot be fully known. The ego is, by definition, subordinate to the self and is related to it like a part to the whole.”⁵⁴ Jung describes the self and the dynamic interplay of its constituents in both scientific and mythological language, giving great specificity to the characteristics and properties of the constituents. Jung posits primordial figures, *archetypes*, in the deep layers of the unconscious that cannot be uprooted. These archetypes project images of mythological proportions, of ancient ancestors, the way they thought, felt and conceived of life. He gives these archetypes the characteristic of being able to grow into the remote future. In a similar way, African thought posits that the African carries within, both physiologically and psychically, ancestors, nature and the community. These images access and influence the ego-consciousness as in Jungian thought. In Jungian and African thought, these “archetypes” interact with consciousness. In African thought, these “archetypes” are not chaotic and nonrational, nor are they disembodied. Their essence is one with reality. The basis of this concept in African thought is its paradoxality, hence, the African axiom, “I am because we are; we are, therefore, I am.”

⁵⁴ Carl Jung, “Aion: Phenomenology of the Self,” in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1971; reprint New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 142.

There is one essence connecting and permeating all things, all beings and the cosmos. Likewise, there is one essence connecting all aspects of the self, which is defined by both internal and external reality. Again, the nature of African cosmology, with its wholism, communalism and its paradoxes engender conceptual constraints in the delineation or articulation of a self-theory for the African American within a Western worldview. A more definitive view of African thought systems will be covered in Chapter 4.

Perhaps the onus of the task of developing alternative models for research rests with social scientists within the African American community. As early as 1978, African American psychologists were laying out frameworks for conceptual models along with strategies to implement these models. These researchers addressed the salient issues, i.e., (1) the framework of black psychology must be derived from the authentic experience base of African Americans; (2) black psychology should concentrate on strengths that African Americans have used historically to survive; and (3) statistical criteria in the search for truth should be broadened to include oral histories, consensual validation and people as witness to their own experience.

In Pastoral Care and Counseling

There exists a dearth of research and resources in the field of Pastoral Care and Counseling within the African American context. Edward Wimberly, in 1979, wrote Pastoral Care in the Black Church which addresses salient issues within this society regarding racism and oppression.⁵⁵ He argues that these issues have been given little attention, if any, within the context of pastoral care and counseling. He challenges the traditional concepts of the function of pastoral care as irrelevant to the needs of society in

⁵⁵ Edward Wimberly, Pastoral Care in the Black Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

light of its history of slavery, racism and oppression. Wimberly states,

Clebsch and Jaekle point out that all four functions that have dominated pastoral care are present in every period of history, but one function may dominate in a particular era because of historical conditions. This is not the general rule in the history of pastoral care in the black church. Guiding and sustaining have both been dominant functions at the same time in the history of pastoral care in the black church; there has been no dominance of one over the other. While sustaining and guiding dominated, reconciliation took a secondary position, and healing became very difficult because of the racial climate....

The fact that social oppression existed did not mean that healing did not take place in the black church. Although the black person's personality was damaged by racism and oppression, wholeness did come for many through the experience of God's love toward them....Healing did exist for some, but for others sustenance was all that could be accomplished....God's love as mediated through the resources of the church prevented and lessened the impact of oppression.⁵⁶

Wimberly penned several subsequent works. Two of these works, Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Values in 1982, and African American Pastoral Care in 1991, challenge the Black Church to mediate its old paradigms of care to create new paradigms that are relevant to more modern times.⁵⁷ In the former book, Wimberly critiques the effects that technological advances have had on the traditional value systems within the black community. He sees traditional spiritual values as both eroding and transforming; he calls for a movement away from the spiritual, the transcendent and advocates practical methods for pastoral counseling ministry in its response to the changing needs of the Black Church.

In African American Pastoral Care, Wimberly's thrust is methodological; he espouses a narrative approach to pastoral care. Wimberly posits that a narrative approach

⁵⁶ Wimberly, Pastoral Care in the Black Church, 20-21. Note: Wimberly cites William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay with Exhibits (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

⁵⁷ Edward Wimberly, Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Values: A Black Point of View (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982); African American Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

has been historically used in the Black Church as a method of giving care, by laity and clergy alike. Story-telling, folktales, anecdotes are all examples of the oral traditions that have sustained African Americans throughout the years. Wimberly becomes intentional in turning the function of narratives toward healing and wholeness.

Wimberly wrote Prayer in Pastoral Counseling⁵⁸ in 1990, in which he proposes the discernment model of pastoral counseling. His belief is that, through prayer, one is able to discern the healing activity of God, thereby enabling one to cooperate with God in this activity. The discernment model emphasizes holistic healing; emotional, interpersonal, spiritual, and physical healing is achieved. In Claiming God, Reclaiming Dignity: African American Pastoral Care,⁵⁹ Wimberly uses his personal experience as a point of departure as he explicates a model for dealing with death, pain and suffering. He uses the internal questions that he experiences in the midst of brokenness; parallels this mode of questioning to the questions posed by the book of Job in the Bible; subsequently names this questioning “God conversation,” and constructs his theory based on “privileging God conversation.” Wimberly places such conversation at the center of self that yields positive sacred identities and transformation. Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching and Pastoral Care is a book in which Wimberly proposes an interrelation between the arenas of pastoral care and preaching as praxis.⁶⁰ Using the bible stories of Jesus’ life and words as the bases for the reconstruction of one’s own story to reflect those spiritual values, convictions, and beliefs that Jesus holds, and which is often done

⁵⁸ Wimberly, Prayer in Pastoral Counseling: Suffering, Healing and Discernment (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

⁵⁹ Edward Wimberly, Claiming God, Reclaiming Dignity: African American Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Edward Wimberly, Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching and Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

in the public arena of preaching, Wimberly advocates the use of this same methodology in pastoral counseling, which is practiced in a more private arena. He proposes a convergence of pastoral counseling and preaching which recognizes that reality and ways of knowing reality are storied, and changing one's view of reality requires attending to people's stories.

Edward Wimberly has written a plethora of books in the area of pastoral care and counseling in the Black Church. I have reviewed only six of these books for the purposes of this dissertation. He stands above all other writers, clinicians and professors as an authority in this area, and provides a wealth of strategies and models to those caregivers who work with African American clients and congregations.

Archie Smith, Jr., in The Relational Self, poses the concepts of relationality and communalism as we struggle towards freedom and as we construct ministries of liberation.⁶¹ Smith proposes to heighten the awareness of the connections, the relationship between spiritual freedom, psychic healing, and social transformation. His theory is based on the interrelatedness of all life. In Navigating the Deep River: Spirituality in African-American Families,⁶² Smith explores the depths of African American spirituality and its efficacy in the quest of the African American toward healing and wholeness. Smith advocates that the placement of African American spiritual discourse be a central and dominant discourse as pastoral counselors, mental health workers, social welfare workers, and other caregivers engage in healing processes. His edited work, with K. Brynolf Lyon, Tending the Flock: Congregations and Family

⁶¹ Archie Smith, Jr., The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

⁶² Archie Smith, Jr., Navigating the Deep River: Spirituality in African-American Families (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997).

Ministry, is a compilation of congregational responses to the innovations, demographic shifts, cultural revolutions and the political economics that have produced changes in American families.⁶³ These congregational studies show how various congregations have begun to address and confront the rising tide of issues and challenges that affect families, such as teenage pregnancy, gender roles, HIV/AIDS, and sexual orientation.

Carroll Watkins Ali, in her Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context, posits that pastoral theology must employ new methodology, a new definition, new goals, new sources, and a new guiding principle, in order to effect the survival and liberation of the African American community.⁶⁴ The premise of Ali's work is that "it is the experiences within a cultural context which determines which sources are appropriate for the development of pastoral theology within that context."⁶⁵ She lifts up key concepts such as communality and contextuality as pivotal considerations toward effecting survival and liberation in the African American context. Moreover, Ali posits that the new paradigm for pastoral theology employ as its guiding principle the encompassing perspective of poor Black Women, who are positioned at the lowest rung of the political, social and economic ladder in this country. She is proposing the introduction of womanist theology as an appropriate framework in meeting the needs of the African American community.

Lee H. Butler, Jr., in A Loving Home: Caring for African American Marriage and Families, presents a myriad of factors, principles and dynamics that are indigenous to the

⁶³ Archie Smith, Jr. and K. Brynolf Lyon, Tending the Flock: Congregations and Family Ministry (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ Carroll Watkins Ali, Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ Ali, xii.

African American heritage and certainly pivotal to healing and wholeness within the community.⁶⁶ He espouses concepts such as: egalitarianism; unity and integration, as a goal of our thinking and in our relationships, and communalism, i.e., acknowledging our connectedness. These are concepts and values that are embedded within the cultural heritage of the African American community. Butler offers this book as a workbook as well, with a set of pertinent questions at the end of each chapter. His critique and analysis of our societal ills and needs are hard-hitting and real, with concrete strategies toward health and wholeness.

While I concur wholeheartedly with the strategies and models that Wimberly, Smith, Ali and Butler espouse, I strongly believe that these strategies and models must have a ground in the distinct basic conception of African spirituality as it derives from the principles of African cosmological systems. That derivation, I believe, inherently employs dynamism, integration and process. The groundedness that these strategies and models must employ must be a literal, concrete understanding of such a concept. The African worldview must be re-evaluated in order to lift it from the place of diminution to which it has been relegated by African Americans themselves.

All of these pastoral theorists and caregivers specifically adhere to the significance and relevance of the integration of African cultural heritage to care and wholeness of the community. I contend that this integration cannot be casual; it must be specifically an African spiritual understanding, from which all else emanates. The African American community must be intentionally re-taught the centrality of spirit in all that we do; our theologies, models, and theories of care and healing must reflect elements of said

⁶⁶ Lee H. Butler, Jr., A Loving Home: Caring for African American Marriage and Families (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000).

spirituality at their base; moreover, these theologies, models and theories must be constructed in such a way that caregivers are empowered to strategize and effect practical applications that come into play. Caregivers must be empowered to recognize and mediate the dualities of brokenness; to conceive paradoxically, that there is utility in either/or, duality; paradox, both/and, and neutrality. The dualities in which we now live, operate, and move, and from which many of our models emanate, color the capacity the African American has for mediation and balance and for creating models that are efficacious for healing in the African American community. No model can be imposed on any given situation or context from which care for African Americans emanate, because no context is the same; rather, it must rise from its own context. There is no uniform expression of African American existence in behaviors, cultures, philosophies or even worldviews; there are many representations and deviations from a basic worldview, which I attempt to illumine in this paper, yet all are basically linked to that parent system.

Alternative Models of Research

I contend that models of care that reflect process, collaboration and dynamism, as well as having an integrative component inherent within the constituency of such models, are very effective in pastoral care and counseling within the African American community. This type of model reflects wholism, energy and life. Such a model encompasses elements of African spirituality in its execution. This is the constitution of groundedness. For example, one alternative model, in reference to the African American male, is posed by Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar and Fawcett, essayists in The American Black Male. These reviewers advocate radical departure from traditional research

methods. They propose community-intervention research which would entail researcher, practitioner and participant joining together to design intervention that would facilitate the participant in reaching personal goals. The goal of traditional research is theory-testing, not problem-solving.

This model also focuses on examination of environmental variables and their influence on the behavior of the individual rather than on the individual's cognitive processes. One of the advantages of this focus is that it helps to avoid the trap of blaming victims for their own predicament. Another advantage is that by focusing on environmental variables, research can then participate in changing those environmental factors which do not support adaptive behaviors.

The process of problem selection for community-intervention research involves collaboration, as well, with the participants. The central question in problem selection is whether the problem is resolvable, given support from the community. A key ingredient to the success of community-intervention research is the ability of the researchers to gain the trust of the community. Researchers are often seen by members of low-income communities as part of the problem rather than the solution.

The remaining elements of this model--knowledge acquisition, project design, field testing and dissemination--are done collaboratively. This model incorporates inclusivity and mutuality, however, it is not well accepted in the traditional research community.

It is important that folk literature is considered and used as a valid, viable resource, particularly in the area of self study. While the scientific literature focuses on measuring characteristics in relation to standardized norms, this literature represents the

African American within phenomenal reality. Myers, Rana, and Harris suggest three such works that depict lives of specific African Americans yet have commonalities with the lives of many African Americans.⁶⁷

The surge in African American women's literature, both fiction and non-fiction, over the past three decades provides a rich field of resources as well, in terms of social analyses and development of self concept. The interplay between one's lived reality and the development of self concept is particularly reflected in the works of authors Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Ntozake Shange. These authors write specifically about African American women's reality.⁶⁸

With the advent of the electronic media and the slight advancements made by African American actresses and actors in commanding roles in Hollywood films, such movies as Boys 'N the Hood, Eve's Bayou, and Jungle Fever also depict life lived as African Americans in the United States. These media portrayals reflect the transaction of environmental demands with development of coping skills to negotiate survival.

Conclusion

Throughout the social science literature on the black child and, more specifically, on the development of the self concept of African Americans, is the common thread of a process of inferiorizing the African American, in hypotheses made, in its assessment tools, in reported results and in the interpretation and use of those results.

Given all this, what are the implications for the African American in society in

⁶⁷ The three works are Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: Random House, 1952); Anne Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi (New York: Dial Press, 1968); Claude Brown, Manchild in the Promised Land (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

⁶⁸ Toni Morrison, Beloved (New York: Knopf, 1987; and The Bluest Eye (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979).

regards to how one understands oneself? Is the concept of self in African Americans affected by the internalization of these scientific findings and conclusion? J. D. R. Porter states, "Racial evaluations are assimilated by the child as part of the total pattern of ideas s/he acquires about the society in which s/he lives."⁶⁹ The patterns of life for the African American are fueled by the patterns of ideas perpetrated by a racist society. Porter further states, "the devaluation of one's racial group can create not only a negative identity but feelings of inadequacy and insecurity on a deeper level as well."⁷⁰

The dissemination of such ideas is pervasive at every level of human existence. It would obtain then, that the concept of self and the criteria by which the African American evaluates and esteems self would derive from those patterns. In a racist society, the reality or worldview of the oppressed, of African Americans, is severely compromised, particularly as one attempts to assimilate.

As a pastoral counselor and pastor who is confronted daily with the pain and brokenness of both African American children and adults, it becomes more clear that neither the African American nor this nation at large can continue to withstand the inefficacies engendered by a racist system. This system engenders violence, abuse, disregard or little regard for the self; it contributes to the ills with which this nation is rife. The inefficacy of a racist system portends the self-destruction of the African American child as well.

Witness the uprising in Los Angeles in the spring of 1992. Witness the children who are members of gang-banging societies. Witness the emergence of Neo-Nazi

⁶⁹ Judith D. R. Porter, Black Child, White Child: The Development of Racial Attitudes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 112.

⁷⁰ Porter, 114.

skinhead groups. We are all touched, oppressor and oppressed alike. It is imperative that the social scientist seek, find and grasp alternative means, which are inclusive, toward the goal of health and healing, to its research.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY EXPLICATION OF CULTURAL SITUATION

African Worldview: Its Cosmology, Ontology, and Philosophy

To engage in any discussion of Africa and its cosmological systems, it is necessary to note the physical realities of the continent and their impact on its value systems and institutions. Usually, change or evolution of thought occurs because of the dictates of contemporary reality as analyzed or interpreted by whomever is given or has the authority to do so. The change of thought occurs on the metaphysical level, i.e., philosophies and cosmologies are a product of this interactive process that emanates from each society's view of its physical world. Alternative realities that are defined by the history of the physical world must also be included in the theory of how change of thought occurs. Kunene believes that one's physical reality correlates profoundly to one's metaphysical speculations; that the evolution of thought or worldview is a by-product of either the interaction or separation of the physical reality and the metaphysical speculation, i. e., worldviews derive from both external and internal realities.¹ Kunene goes further:

African cosmology states that human beings do not begin with the so-called homo sapiens, but with the beginnings of the primary seed of the species. The changes and transformations that might have taken place in their structure merely refer to peripheral qualities. If indeed any of the species would have been unable to cope with the physical world, they would not have been transformed, but would have become extinct.²

The physical factors of the African world are defined by its vastness, its climate

¹ Kunene, 2.

² Kunene, 2.

and the easy mobility within the continent. Many countries would fit snugly within it, including the United States, China, India, etc. Africans perceive the continent as their world; that they have not come from any other place; that the African continent is a self-sufficient world; that the world is made up of Africans and those who reside outside of Africa, non-Africans. The size of the continent contributes to Africa's unique thought system; however, the size of the continent, alone, does not explain the evolution of a common worldview.

Another physical condition of Africa that must be considered is its climate. The entire continent enjoys a warm climate, for it is located within the tropical or semi-tropical regions. There are no climactic extremes, which make the African world highly habitable, with very little adjustment to one's physical environment. Kunene suggests that African life is primarily spent outdoors in interaction with outside reality, which is opposed to the European practice of spending seventy to ninety percent confinement indoors. Therefore, the African thought expressions are influenced heavily by the physical reality experienced in everyday life³. In visiting northern and southern Ghana in both rural and urban areas, I was struck by the materials and architecture used for many edifices in Africa, particularly churches, that are built without walls and windows, and without insulation because of the climate. Many of the villages consist of huts built from clay and straw. Some housing appear as lean-tos or shanties; much cooking and washing dishes and clothes are done outside.

Metaphysically, the African perception of the world is of a coexistential relationship between the physical and the spiritual realities and yet not separated or in

³ Kunene, 3.

opposition to each other. The perception is of a continuous world that is always in a state of transformation, regeneration and settlement. Kunene describes the point of settlement as

the point of equilibrium combining the elements of destruction and regeneration. The point of reconciliation is therefore more crucial than the point of disturbance and conflict since it is, by definition, the potential that contains the annihilative principle and the regenerative principle. Seen in this perspective, the world and the universe are without end. But unlike the theological doctrine, the principle exists as a reality based upon the observation of the physical world, not as a consequence of an ethical action...the African system emphasizes the potential as more crucial than the manifestation of phenomena.⁴

The point of reconciliation manifests between the element of destruction and the element of regeneration. It is the point of equilibrium, as well, which combines these two elements. Within the point of reconciliation lies the potential for both/and.

The role of experience in African thought, then, becomes significant in the characterization of African thought, given the centrality of the physical world in the origin of African thought systems.

Mobility is the third critical factor of the physical world of Africa. Within the continent itself, easy mobility is facilitated by the Sahara desert, specifically between western and northern Africa. The desert has served as a busy highway between the two. Because of this mobility, migration from one place to another is frequent, particularly from rural areas to the city, where jobs and resources are more plentiful; therefore, there exists the interaction of a multiplicity of cultures and ideas. In the city of Accra, Ghana, it is the case that in a single church, scriptures are read and the worship service is translated in as many as three different languages. On my trip to a northern rural area of Ghana, where we visited several churches in villages located within a twenty-mile radius,

⁴ Kunene, 4

our team was accompanied by three translators, each of a different language. A translator's services was used according the prevailing language spoken within a congregation. Many Africans are multi-lingual as well.

Due to media representations of Africa on other continents and in other countries, the misconception abounds that "jungle" area characterizes the African world. Kunene points out that "jungle area is no more than five percent of the surface area of the continent. It means simply that there is more jungle in Europe (proportionately speaking) than in Africa and certainly more jungle in South America than Africa."⁵ Therefore, there are no rivers, jungles, mountain ranges or other geographical impediments to overcome. The land is not seen as a hostile entity, but more as an embracing accommodation. The earth world is the primary world of the African. The sky world is the world of the Gods. Kunene postulates that in African thought and life, the non-physical or the metaphysical world is conceived of very realistically. Therefore, an ancestral feast, while physical, is both a physical phenomenon that is meant for community solidarity as well as a non-physical appeal for intervention to the world of the Gods.⁶

For the African, existence, i.e. ontology, is inextricably interwoven with religion. Fundamentally, humankind exists in a religious universe in Africa. Religion permeates every facet of their being. Early western writers have often labeled African religions as primitive, as ancestor worship or as magic.⁷ These descriptions have been derogatory

⁵ Kunene, 4-5.

⁶ Kunene, 5.

⁷ These theories were propagated by early western writers as a means of domination by western missionaries and apologists. In the name of instilling civilization to a "primitive" people practicing "primitive" religions, these theories served to justify their actions. For further information on these theories, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

and inadequate; they have served to propagate such attitudes as a means of cultural dominance. Mbiti separates this religious ontology into five categories, which are seen in terms of its relation to humankind.

1. God
2. Spirits
3. Man
4. Animals and Plants
5. Phenomena and objects without biological life

Mbiti explicates further on these categories:

One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another. In addition to the five categories, there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate, and use it, such as the medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities.⁸

In traveling through the country of Ghana, West Africa, it was interesting to note that the names of consumer goods and businesses were comprised of biblical phrases or had religious connotations, such as Grace and Mercy Beauty Shop, Celestial Hands Lumber Yard, or Anointed Cooking Oil. Common names reflected this practice as well. As Kunene puts it, “the very idea of the Creator is realized in the idea of the self manifestation, but is not itself the definition of the Creator.”⁹

Slave Culture, Retentions and their Significance as Models of Care

Jones’s Catechism enjoined slaves to count their Masters ‘worthy of all honor,’ as those whom God has placed over them in this world; ‘*with all fear*,’ [italics in original] they are to be ‘*subject to them*’ [italics in original] and obey them in all *things*, [italics in original] possible and lawful, with good will and endeavour to *please them well*, [italics in original]...and

⁸ John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1990), 16.

⁹ Kunene, 5.

let Servants serve their masters as faithfully behind their backs as before their faces. God is present to see, if their masters are not.¹⁰

Slavery existed in the United States of America for over two hundred years. It was legal and considered Christian by slaveholders. Slavery was accepted as an economic fact of life, sanctioned by Scriptures according to the masters, and held up to be a good thing. A large portion of this new country was built upon the backs of black Africans, brought to this new land against their will. The catechism quoted above, among many, was a method of instruction for slaves, to improve their morals and to keep them honest and reliable. Since, it was illegal for slaves to be taught to read and write, these catechisms were given the slave by oral instruction. Religion was central to the culture of the slaves as they lived their lives of desolation, desperation and sorrow, bereft of name, god, belief system, country and a sense of belonging. Although participation in the churches of the masters, and in churches of their own as well, was allowed, there were many restrictions to this participation which also placed them under the authority and the watchful eyes of their masters. In many of the mixed churches, the gap between the slave's religion and that of the masters' was heightened. However deep and abiding the faith of the master was, it was not so deep as to warrant the freedom of the slave. The line drawn between slavery and freedom was the limit of Christian fellowship. In the rural plantations, the institutional church was beyond the reach of slaves due to the sparsity of churches in the rural South, however, slaves who lived in the towns and cities flocked to these churches in record numbers. Black churches were also erected for blacks alone; they were pastored by ordained black clergymen. These churches were also some of the largest churches in their associations. These separate black churches did resist the

¹⁰ Raboteau, 162.

association's attempts to constrict their autonomy. These Christian slaves fashioned these worship services to fit their own needs as an enslaved people in America, just as the slaves who did not have access to these churches and who were denied the freedom to practice their religion, conducted their worship services in the hush harbors and in the slave cabins in ways that prevented detection by their masters.

The church, both visible and invisible, was the single institution of the South through which black Africans as slaves were allowed some modicum of freedom. Therefore, it became for them the web of their community.

An account of how they practiced religion in the slave quarters described by the Reverend Green to interviewers from Fisk University is recorded thusly,

At night, especially in the summertime, after everybody had eaten supper, it was a common thing for us to sit outside. The old folks would get together and talk until bedtime. Sometimes somebody would start humming an old hymn, and then the next-door neighbor would pick it up. In this way it would finally get around to every house, and then the music started. Soon everybody would be gathered together, and such singing! It wouldn't be long before some of the slaves got happy and started to shouting.¹¹

Many of the retentions of the slave culture that are a continued practice in today's society stem from its religious and spiritual practices. It must be noted that the slaves' legacy from an African worldview lay in its ontology, which was indeed a religious one. There is no dichotomy between their way of being, their self-manifestation and the interaction and relationship to that self-manifestation. Their religion is interwoven into their everyday life. Having been stripped of their land, their kin, their sense of belonging, their name – so many essentials that are basic to maintaining esteem of self – the creativity and resourcefulness and the ability to adapt is a measure of the power of that

¹¹ Raboteau, 220.

driving force, the spirituality that is inherent in their worldview. I contend that, inherent in their spirituality is healing power, that when utilized, exists as a model of care of the self.

The songs, now characterized as “negro spirituals,” that emanated from the slave culture, sprang from the struggle and strife of slaves’ existence and their hope for freedom and a better life. Raboteau describes one spiritual as having meaning for abolitionist Frederick Douglass and his fellows as they plotted to escape,

A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of

O Canaan, sweet Canaan,
I am bound for the land of Canaan,

something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *North*, and the North was our Canaan.

I thought I heard them say
There were lions in the way;
I don’t expect to stay
Much longer here.
Run to Jesus, shun the danger.
I don’t expect to stay
Much longer here,

was a favorite air, and had a double meaning. On the lips of some it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of spirits, but on the lips of our company, it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage to a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.¹²

The spirituals are very much alive today in African American culture. However, they are not as pervasive throughout the culture as they were thirty-five years ago, when school systems were desegregated, and all-black public schools were ordered closed. bell hooks, in Teaching to Transgress, writes in her introduction,

¹² Raboteau, 247. Raboteau’s notes indicate that Douglass’ entry was one of many in the Flat River Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1786-1938. (Manuscripts, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.)

Schools changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority.

hooks further states,

That shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination.¹³

The present generation of African Americans has little knowledge of the history and significance of the songs of the slaves. They do not hear these songs. The present generation has little knowledge or understanding of education as the practice of freedom. This generation understands that freedom for African Americans in the United States has been achieved. Young African Americans believe that they, too, can participate as equals in the American Dream; that this is their legacy as well. Having been educated in all-black public schools in the segregated South of the 1950s and 1960s, the advantage was that my generation was exposed to historical elements of black culture that served to nurture and heal, such as the spirituals. We were taught these spirituals; we sang these spirituals in our schools, in our churches, and in our communities; we knew the significance they held for the slaves during their lifetimes. We knew the significance they held for us as we lived under the Jim Crow laws, the racism, the domination and oppression that reigned in the South for African Americans, as well as in the North, East

¹³ bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3-4.

and West. There are no traveling troupes as the Fisk University Jubilee Singers who carried these songs around the world.

With the Jim Crow laws outlawed, educational institutions integrated, more opportunities for upward mobility for African Americans, many of us are lulled into a sense that we are really free and that the “American Dream” is available to us. Many of the current generation of African Americans have never been exposed to the history of African Americans in the United States.

Still, some retentions of the African culture have evolved from the slave culture to contemporary time. Much of the folklore that we enjoy today, particularly, the Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and Brer Wolf folk tales are directly derived from the African tribes of the Hausa, the Fulani and the Mandinka.¹⁴ African American poet and songwriter James Weldon Johnson, in the preface of his book, God’s Trombones, first published in 1927, writes,

I remember hearing in my boyhood sermons that were current, sermons that passed with only slight modification from preacher to preacher and from locality to locality. Such sermons were, “The Valley of Dry Bones,” which was based on the vision of the prophet in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel; the “Train Sermon,” in which both God and the devil were pictured as running trains, one loaded with saints, that pulled up in heaven, and the other with sinners, that dumped its load in hell; the “Heavenly March,” which gave in detail the journey of the faithful from earth, on up through the pearly gates to the great white throne.

Johnson further states,

The old time Negro preacher is rapidly passing. I have here tried sincerely to fix something of him.¹⁵

¹⁴ Holloway, Joseph, “The Origins of African-American Culture,” in Africanisms in American Culture, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 16.

¹⁵ James Weldon Johnson, God’s Trombones (New York: Viking Press, 1927), 1.

Retentions extend to preached sermons, as Johnson states. I, as well, have heard variations of the sermon, "The Valley of Dry Bones." In many circles, among modern day black preachers, it is considered a feat to be able to preach in the style, art and grace of the old time Black preacher. Generally, great focus is placed on preaching in the Black church, by parishioners and preachers alike. Historically, the function of the preacher and the message of the preacher were several. The preaching that was done by black preachers in the hush harbors of the time was primarily the domain of male slaves; this task provided some status for him among the slaves. To preach at or even attend a secret worship service in the hush harbor was an act of courage for the slave, for many slave owners believed that the praying in the services was against them. Frequently, the preacher passed messages in his sermons to slaves on neighboring plantations, some of which were concerning the underground railroad and other escapes to freedom. Though the slaves devised means to keep their meetings secret, at times, they were discovered by their masters. Ex-slave Charlotte Martin "asserted that her oldest brother was whipped to death for taking part in one of the religious ceremonies."¹⁶ Raboteau gives an account of an ex-slave, who declared,

Meetings back there meant more than they do now. Then everybody's heart was in tune, and when they called on God they made heaven ring. It was more than just Sunday meeting and then no godliness for a week. They would steal off to the fields and in the thickets and there...they called on God out of heavy hearts.¹⁷

There has been considerable discussion among social scientists, educators and laypersons regarding the existence of retentions in African American culture. At the center of a primary debate was the belief that "African retentions were negligible because the

¹⁶ Raboteau, 215.

¹⁷ Raboteau, 217.

African was almost totally stripped of his culture by the process of enslavement; and the other, that the slave system did not destroy the slaves' African culture and a considerable number of Africanisms continue to define Afro-American culture in the United States."¹⁸ Significant and cogent arguments were made by proponents of both sides, for example, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, of the former proposition and social scientist Melville J. Herskovits, the latter.

One other discussion centered around linguistic patterns, particularly, as to the validity of Ebonics, a linguistic form that is derived from slave culture. Asante suggests that "Africans were not linguists learning language, but lay persons acquiring an instrument for their survival."¹⁹ Asante concludes with the assertion that

Retention of lexical items constitutes one part of the continuity, but the major burden of African-American English has been carried by communicative processes as the African-American manner in expression, supported in the main by serialization and a unique usage of tense and aspect. Neither phenomenon has any analogue in the English language, providing further proof that Ebonics derived in large part from the genius of West African languages.²⁰

The cultural reality of African Americans today is greatly influenced and defined by our heritage and legacy from the continent of Africa, from slave culture in the United States, from the culture of emancipated slaves, from the movements toward freedom, from the violence of segregation and the insidious, overt and covert racism that define our existence in the United States today.

¹⁸ Raboteau, 48.

¹⁹ Molefi Asante, "African Elements in African-American English," in Africanisms in American Culture, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 22.

²⁰ Asante, "African Elements in African-American English," 31.

The Evolution of Religion and Spirituality in African American Culture

Religion and spirituality characterize the nature of existential living for Africans. These elements derive from an African worldview, and therefore, constitute their way of being in the world. The process of life for the African is integrative, naturally. African thought systems seek to explicate what is basic and fundamental to the worldview. The expressions of the peoples of the continent are by no means uniform; nor are they immutable. The expressions are affected by certain factors that persist within the culture, among which are cultural crises, crises of resources, or the need to reorganize the society to meet the crises. In other words, there can be variations, deviations or differing representations within the parent system.

In Africa, the above phenomenon is evidenced in the many different languages throughout the continent, the variety of religious practices, the different lesser gods (for in the pantheon of gods, there is one High God) that are worshipped, their religious hierarchies, etc.; yet, the migration of the peoples within the continent remains at a high rate.

Being brought to America and to other countries in the diaspora as slaves was a crisis of epic proportion for the African slave. Everything in the African's concrete reality was stripped away. To survive the confinement in the slave dungeons on the west coast of Africa as they awaited deportation from their continent was an anomaly, given the conditions of both the dungeons and their confinement. Yet, the Europeans managed to transport millions of human beings over a span of four centuries for the purpose of trade, human beings being their chattel.

The Africans themselves were not without guile in this enterprise. Their participation was necessary in order for this event in history to take place.

The slave trade has been the ruling principle of my people. It is the source their glory and wealth....

King Gezo of Dahomey to
Captain Winniett,
United States Navy, 1840²¹

Nevertheless, the Africans became the chattel of the plantation owner, subject to his authority and whims. As such, the world view which facilitates the capacity to function in life in an integrated way served slaves in the adaptation of conditions that existed in their new lives – conditions that were no longer caring or nurturing.

Peter Paris, social ethicist, writes,

As have all peoples who are uprooted from their cultures and transplanted to an alien environment, African slaves brought their worldviews with them into the diaspora. Though different in many respects, they all shared one primary feature, namely, their belief in a sacred cosmos created and preserved by a supreme deity. In fact, everything they thought and did reflected the sacred nature of the cosmos. In other words, their cultural creations---their songs, music, dances, stories, art---transcended any secular-sacred dichotomy. In fact, they were considered relevant for the whole of life: work, play, and worship. This orientation enabled African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora to live in the presence of their gods and to view all things as ordered or disordered by the latter's will.²²

It was no small task for the slaves to effect a different reality for themselves. They were able to fashion a world for themselves, replete with symbols and cultural artifacts. A retention that exists in today's culture is the tradition of "jumping the broomstick" in wedding ceremonies. The wedding ceremony was a solemn occasion, but the irony was that there was always the possibility to be sold away from one's spouse. Because the

²¹ Hugh Thomas, The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 673.

²² Peter J. Paris, The Spirituality of African Peoples (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 34.

marriages were not legal, they created their own “legality,” the most frequent of which was jumping the broomstick.

While many Africans were converted to Christianity, that is not to suggest that they abandoned their traditional beliefs for Christianity. It is safe to say that some Christian practices and beliefs were Africanized in order for the slaves to express them within their own cultural context. The “ring shout” was practiced by many slaves, where, as characterized by Raboteau, “the leader would call out a verse of a spiritual while the shouters responded by walking around in a circle. When the singers who stood outside the ring took up the chorus, the shout proper would begin with the ring band shuffling rapidly to the beat announced by the hand-clapping and foot-tapping of the chorus of singers.”²³ The ring shout also reflects an example of the “call-and-response” patterns in singing and preaching that continues to exist in many African American churches today. While the slave owners preached slavery as a Christian practice, justifying it with biblical passages, slaves knew that they were not free as well as they knew that the conditions of slavery were dehumanizing and brutal. They were also well aware that they were not free to worship the God of Christianity in a manner that was conducive and efficacious for them, hence, the hush harbors, out of the range of sight and hearing of their masters.

Peter Randolph states,

Not being allowed to hold meetings in the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking boughs from the trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot. Arrangements are then made for conducting the exercises. They first ask each other how they feel, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then select a certain space in separate groups, for their division of the meeting. Preaching in order, by the brethren; then praying and singing all around, until they generally feel quite happy....

²³ Raboteau, 245.

The slave forgets all his sufferings except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming, "Thank God, I shall not live here always." Then they pass from one to another, shaking hands, and bidding each other farewell, promising, should they meet no more on earth, to strive and meet in heaven, where all is joy, happiness and liberty. As they separate, they sing a parting hymn of praise....Most of the songs used in worship are composed by the slaves themselves and describe their own suffering.²⁴

How did the slaves endure such a despicable and horrid life? What were the resources on which they could draw? The syncretization of these differing religious faiths, Christianity and African Traditional Religion, produced for the slaves a religion of their own, a brand of Christianity that was contextual; that sustained and nurtured them. They were bereft of all else. Joseph Washington, Jr. goes further in his articulation of this phenomenon, as he posits a Black religion, a.k.a. folk religion, which was "born in slavery, weaned in segregation and reared in discrimination and served two functions for the African American, both protest and relief."²⁵ Washington states:

The uniqueness of black religion is the racial bond which seeks to risk its life for the elusive but ultimate goal of freedom and equality by means of protest action. It does so through the only avenues to which its members have always been permitted a measure of access, religious convocations in the fields or in houses of worship.

The genius of the Negro folk religion is not readily understandable apart from the awareness of the black and white streams of which it is constituted. The white stream began with the missionaries who beat a path to the door of the Negro slave. Their main purpose was to extol the virtues of the next world. From the earliest days, the Negro was much more concerned with the freedom of this world than with the religion of the next. He listened attentively to the religious and moral teachings of the whites, but his mind was elsewhere. He was resourceful enough to perceive that the best way to freedom in this world was through the religion of the whites, sanctioned by his masters and overseers as a means of harnessing his energy for production.²⁶

²⁴ Peter Randolph, "Plantation Churches: Visible and Invisible," in Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, ed. Milton Sernett (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 66.

²⁵ Joseph Washington, Jr., Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 33.

²⁶ Washington, Black Religion, 33.

As slavery was outlawed, the Black Church, with its concomitant folk religion, championed the cause of freedom and equal opportunity for the now freed African Americans. Free Northern ministers had established congregations independent of their white sponsors; they were now giving leadership to this new population. Segregation had become the order of the day; African Americans continued to live and labor in an oppressive and racist society. Washington characterizes the merger of the now freed African Americans of the South with their Northern counterparts in this way,

This independent movement was a response to segregation in, and, later, exclusion from, white congregational communions, first in the North and then in the South. Frustrated by their inability to express in open ways the militant drive for freedom which in slavery was channeled through escapes to the North, the post civil war Negro folk put their trust in and merged with the independents, who, like the folk, were instructed by whites, but, unlike the folk, brought to this union the institutional procedures of whites....The union of the folk religion and independents created in the Negro congregation a center for the relief of the Freedman. This was assumed to be a temporary need and the folk anticipated the day when the preacher and the fellowship would bring about freedom and equality.

But the hope for the minister and the fellowship was not realized. Following Reconstruction the old practice of segregation was resumed with a vengeance in the South and discrimination continued in the North. These evils curbed the militancy of the folk religion. In that era of decline in the quest for freedom, the Negro minister remained the spokesman for the people with this difference---faced by insurmountable obstacles, he succumbed to the cajolery and bribery of the white power structure and became its foil. Instead of freedom, he preached moralities and emphasized rewards in the life beyond, in much the same manner as the white missionaries.²⁷

Many movements emerged within the last century among African Americans in the quest for freedom and equal opportunity. In the meantime, African Americans continue to exist as second class citizens in the United States, still carrying the one resource that was solely their own, the one resource that has brought them through up to

²⁷ Washington, Black Religion, 34-35.

the present time, that resource being their spirituality. However, this resource is affected as well by the context in which African Americans live and breathe.

Conclusion

As we, African Americans, assess and analyze our society and its institutions to determine our place within it, we oftentimes find that the racist attitudes and behaviors have not been eradicated; they have simply taken on a different face. This face of today is beguiling to the African American; it can lure one into a consciousness that implies egalitarianism, that the American dream exists for all.

In order to exist in a state of immense and intense deprivation as a definition for one's life, for one's community, it is incumbent upon that community to employ ways and means that are endemic to endurance and survival through a particular situation. However, it becomes problematic for the African American when the process (ways and means) through which one survives become static rather than dynamic. At the point of stasis, the African American can verily fall prey to the trap of basking in paradigms that are no longer efficacious for healing and wholeness, for life.

Discernment of the spirit of God as that spirit touches and guides one's life becomes critical to the endeavor for life, not just survival. Through one's religion, whatever that religion may be, one must be able to access the spirituality of one's heritage. One might say that African Americans have the dual heritage of worldviews of both Africa and America. I would agree; it is the ill-mediation of this dual existence of the African American that lends to a lack of hope and dis-ease within the community. For the most part, the focus of the African American community draws too much on the heritage that we have from America. Our paradigms are derived from philosophies and

ontologies of Western thought. The retrieval of African traditions and Africa's concept of spirit is essential to healthful living and survival for the African American. A West African wisdom symbol is the *sankofa*, a bird with its head turned backward, which means "go back and fetch it"; a symbol for importance for remembering the past in order to plan for the future. The dynamism inherent in traditional African understanding of spirit, its integration into the everyday lives of African peoples, I believe, is a gift of the Creator to African peoples in the Diaspora. The Creator was/is not absent from the event of slavery, or any of the societal ills that have beset African American people throughout these four hundred years or so. Our spirituality must be mediated in such a way that it functions as the ground for the provision of healing and wholeness; that liberation is continually effected in this society. The irony is that we, all peoples of America, are enslaved, seeking liberation, living under the illusion of privilege and freedom.

CHAPTER 4

THE FORMULATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SELF THEORY

With the institution of slavery in America and its accoutrements, the stage was set within the United States of America for the evolution of a reality that would literally define an existence for slaves and their descendants that is filled with fear, mistrust and violence; their tools of negotiating and mediating this environment would be their minds, bodies and spirits. Within the constraints of this new reality in America, the slaves, in order to live lives that would be suitable and viable for the time, and to live lives within a context that would be nourishing, liberative and salvific to the self as well, would need ingenuity and fortitude to survive. Survival did indeed become a primary goal and, for many, the weight and effects of this traumatic culture impeded their transcendence of this environment. Mere survival remains the state of existence for many African Americans today. The history of violence in this country toward African Americans has become so ingrained and internalized by African Americans that their own expectations for themselves are skewed.

The necessity of a coherent ideological base is critical to African Americans in this country if one's sense of self and one's sense of belonging is to remain healthful and constructive. According to historian Gerda Lerner, the African American is confronted with the responsibility of mediating between European and African cultures an acceptable socialization to discriminatory patterns while maintaining an esteemable sense of self.¹

¹ Gerda Lerner, "Black Women in the United States: A Problem in Historiography and Interpretation," in The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 80.

The imposition of the human will of those of the dominant culture onto African Americans, coupled with the distortion of the African belief system, deprived the African American of inherent, viable and concrete tools with which to negotiate survival and healthful living within a racist society, self intact. The reductionistic view of African American reality that has been assumed by many African Americans facilitates their assimilation into a society that does not value their culture in many ways.

Myriad defense systems that emerged out of slave culture as a means of survival and perpetuated through racism, have often become a more prevailing need than the transmission of African traditions and value systems.² Systems of survival, such as communal care, which strengthened individual members of the community, made them less vulnerable to exploitation and physical and psychological harm by whites; incorporating Caucasoid standards of beauty, i.e., light skin, straight hair, into their own standards to acquire acceptability and to raise status, have been and continue to be, transmitted throughout the generations. It is not always expedient to be distinctly African; nor is it always realistic. For many African Americans throughout history, physical, emotional and economic survival has guided choices in how one lives out one's life.

The contexts of slavery, segregation and systemic racism continue to serve as catalysts for the re-creation of self while, at the same, contributing in large part to the degradation, despair and hopelessness that define existence for many African Americans. While all African Americans are not entangled in this cycle, all African Americans are

² An example of new value systems that emerged out of slavery is reflected in the influence of skin color on the dynamics within the African American family and intra-culturally as well. There are many African Americans with very fair skin who "pass for white." Those who "pass" are usually not known to

susceptible to it, simply because of the physical characteristic of darker skin color. However, in order for the African American to survive and thrive in the American culture, it is necessary to rely on those skill sets that arise out of contexts and worldviews of Africa. The ability to conceive paradox, the dual nature of organisms, as whole, as one, which is a component of African worldviews, forms the basis for the art and gift of mediation of realities, contexts, situations, experiences and circumstances. That mediation has to be continuous, ongoing and dynamic; it must be processual, for mediation is the formula for integration of the multitude of dynamics that define the self.

As an African American caregiver, giving care to African American clients, the systems of care and counseling that I have been educated in, practiced and taught, are theories and therapies that have arisen out of philosophies, epistemologies and ontologies of Eurocentric worldviews that do not embrace the realities of Africentric worldviews. Consequently, the labels that are often placed upon African American clients which, in turn, determine methods of treatment, are frequently problematic. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is the basic tool used by diverse clinicians.³ Yet, this tool has contributed to the mislabeling or misdiagnoses of disorders among African Americans because little or no consideration of social and cultural influences was given in setting its criteria for diagnoses.

As clinicians, pastoral counselors, psychiatrists, family therapists and others in the healing professions are exposed to the world of the African American and dare to enter into that worldview, then therapies can begin to take on new shapes as well; therapies that

those within the dominant culture as African American and are not exposed as such by other African Americans who are aware of their duplicity.

³ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV, 4th ed. (Washington, D. C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

will reflect wholeness and inclusivity of African American perspectives in the objective of human transformation. African American psychiatrist Frances Cress Welsing proposes what she terms *a unified field theory psychiatry*, which is derived from the work of physicist Albert Einstein.⁴ Welsing states that her developing conviction is

that the present confusion is largely a result of our failure to see the interconnections that exist between many seemingly isolated, disconnected behavior-energy phenomena in Western culture. Actually there are very few, if any, workers in behavioral science who perceive the necessity to search out, on the one hand, these interconnections and, on the other hand, to unveil the total unified form that is structured by these interconnections and their fundamental cause.⁵

Welsing further postulates, "It is clear to many that grave problems are confronting the field of psychiatry at theoretical and conceptual levels. This crisis has important implications for treatment as well as problems encountered in formulating diagnostic categories as evidenced in the controversies surrounding the task of developing Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III."⁶ Welsing began to develop her theory in earnest, after reading an article in the June 1980 issue of Clinical Psychiatry News by Alan Stone, the outgoing president of the American Psychiatric Association, who had this to offer about the derivation of structures and barriers that serve to enshrine elitism in the field of psychiatry:

The new walls are being built as psychiatrists attempt to deal with the issues of racism, homosexuality, and the situation of women....These are all issues which have confronted us in our practice, challenged the moral assumptions that lie concealed in our theories, and confounded us with disputes and acrimony in our association. It is no accident that each (issue) invites psychiatry to take a stand on human values. Human values, after all, are a

⁴ Frances Cress Welsing, The Isis (Yssis) Papers (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991), 41-43. Welsing distinguishes Einstein as the most recognized and highly renowned scientist in the history of Western civilization, who spent the greater portion of his productive years in search of a unified field theory that would combine all of the different manifestations of energy phenomena in the universe.

⁵ Welsing, 43.

⁶ Welsing, 40.

crucial link in the chain that binds the self to society. To take a stand on them reveals something about our own selves, our own relations to society, and our own vision of what it means to love and to work. Many psychiatrists believe that the APA should limit itself to issues that are clearly psychiatric, but many others believe that these social issues are clearly psychiatric. I shall claim that what separates these two groups can only be understood as part of the deep theoretic dilemma in which American psychiatry finds itself: its lack of conceptual clarity. This theoretical ambiguity is the core of the conflict that confronts psychiatry. As pragmatic eclectics, uncertain that we have put the pieces of the picture together correctly, we can never be confident that we can distinguish between the sick patient and the sick society. Psychiatry's contribution to what it means to be a person is its most powerful aspect. That contribution cannot be under psychiatry's control in a free society. However, the profession has a responsibility for the hidden values in its theories and therapies, which contribute to the shaping of 'contemporary consciousness.' Psychiatry does not stand outside of history or morality, but how do psychiatrists decide which history and which morality to accept? The rules about which history and which morality to accept are not clearly described in the biologic, psychodynamic, and behavioral paradigms.⁷

The formulation of African American self theory in this chapter will involve a theory base for construction of an African sense of self that derives from African cosmology, my personal perspective as pastoral counselor and one who was raised and educated in segregated social systems in the South, and research in African psychology and anthropology.⁸

African Self Theory

The African perceives the world as both physical and metaphysical with a coexistential relationship between the two. The earth is seen as a physical entity,

⁷ Welsing, 39-40, quoting Alan M. Stone, "Retreat Behind Walls Seen as Posing Danger for Psychiatry," Clinical Psychiatry News, June 1980.

⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, research traditions within African psychology originate either in English-speaking or French-speaking Africa. The French-speaking tradition is characterized by its predominant interest in affective variables and the clinical psychiatric phenomena of human personality. The broad scope and comprehensiveness of the human behavioral phenomena, i.e., dreams, child-rearing practices, psychopathology, etc., is characteristic of the French-speaking tradition in its research. Its realistic orientation attempts an understanding of the cultural determinants of human behavior to a greater degree than does the English-speaking tradition. Therefore, my resources are reflective of the French-speaking tradition.

coexisting with an entity which is beyond the earth world and sometimes referred to as the sky world; yet the two are not separated, nor are they in opposition to each other.

African philosophy is inextricably interwoven in the whole of life. Though colonialism, slavery, racism, urbanization, education, class mobility and modern change have all had a profound impact on traditional thought and religion of Africans and African Americans in such a way that the African worldview cannot remain static, it is by no means extinct. Often African Americans revert to such traditions in secret to avoid the stigma that is attached to such thought. The stigma grows out of the devaluing of such tradition by many African Americans in an attempt to acculturate into a racist society, which, in turn, devalues the tradition in order to justify a status of superiority for itself. Most assuredly, however, in times of crises or anxiety, the tradition surfaces for the African American.

The self, in African thought, cannot be conceived except in relationship with everything around it. Therefore, the self comprises and is comprised of a system of social relations and interactions that includes the entities within the spiritual or metaphysical realm. The self system is analogous to African ontology espoused by John Mbiti, an ontology which he terms anthropocentric. Mbiti's understanding of that ontology is that "God is the originator and sustainer of humankind; the spirits explain the destiny of humankind, humankind is the center of this ontology. The animals, plants, and objects constitute the environment in which humankind lives, provide a means for the existence of humankind and if need be, humankind establishes a mystical relationship with them."⁹ According to Mbiti, this ontology is a complete unity which implies that to

⁹ John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970), 20.

remove any one of the categories is to destroy the entire existence, including the Creator, which is impossible.¹⁰ These categories of ontology comprise a system.

Africanist Dominique Zahan adds to his understanding of self in his statement,

The preliminaries of African mysticism are located on the level of the perishable casing that is the human being. The duality between the "soul" and the body is sharply felt by the African, who attributes to the first of these elements the characteristics of permanence and continuity, while he grants to the second change and growth....There can be no mystical life if the importance given to the body does not diminish to the advantage of the soul. Hence the eminent value earned in his eyes by the practices whose goal is physical suffering, mortification and privation. Ascetism of the body, it is thought, sharpens the sensitivity of the mind, conferring upon it a greater liberty, by orienting it toward interior life....The mystical life of the African does not isolate the individual, nor does it strip him of social loyalties, his duties or his work. Rather, it permits him to realize him-self more fully in his daily activity and his usual occupation.¹¹

From the point of view of African psychology, and focusing, in particular, on the analysis of self and personality, perceiving one's body as alienated from oneself as abnormal would not apply. This point of view is analogous to the scriptural passage,

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.¹²

the body being the seed covering; the soul being the embryo and the essence of the fruit.

For, according to African thought, the human being does not possess the unity that is attributed it. The individual psyche is not felt to be an undivided whole. There exists an element among the component principles of the self which allows one to "double" oneself at certain moments in life. This is a widespread concept in Africa, if not a universal one.¹³ The self naturally possesses a point of fission, probably situated at the

¹⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 21.

¹¹ Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, trans. Kate Ezra Martin and Lawrence M. Martin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 127.

¹² John 12:24, NRSV.

¹³ Zahan, 9.

border of the conscious and unconscious; this characteristic assures the African of a wide gamut of para-human possibilities, for example, the ability to be in two different places at once and clairvoyance, to name two.¹⁴ These phenomena, doubling, clairvoyance, and other para-human possibilities, are attributed to the concept of the African self. Zahan goes on to state that nowhere is the African psyche ever limited to “that which is not the other and does not come from him.”¹⁵

An understanding of self from an African perspective would allow for what is deemed psychic phenomena in Western terminology, such as out-of-body experiences, interactions with apparitions and ghosts, and doubling oneself, as normal and healthful happenings. Moreover, such interactions and experiences can lend to esteem of self. Zahan suggests that the African carries within, physiologically and psychically, spirits of those who have gone before and those who are to come. The media, throughout the years, have portrayed psychic phenomena in African culture and behavior as ancestor worship, “mumbo-jumbo,” superstition, characterizing Africa as the “Dark Continent” in need of civilization from a primitive state. While the above statement may serve as commentary on what is termed “psychic phenomena” in African culture and behavior, there is no denial that elements of superstition, ancestor worship, and the like do exist within this framework. Many Africans who inhabit the islands along the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina practice magic, hoodoo, and witchcraft today. However, such a media depiction of psychic phenomena or spirituality in Africa serves to relegate a people and their practices, their view of reality, to a place of diminution. Traditionally, psychic phenomena are not anomalous to African culture. Rather, it is so thoroughly

¹⁴ Zahan, 8.

¹⁵ Zahan, 9.

integrated into the common day to day practices of life that for the African of both traditional and modern time, one is loathe to categorize it as “psychic phenomena.” It is so systematized as to be perceived as natural phenomena.

The African self is thus more “social” than “individual.” The self is defined precisely by that which it is and that which it receives from others at any moment.¹⁶ An African concept of self, then, would bring to itself the sum of all that comprises the universe, both physically and metaphysically, and which interplays and interacts at any given moment with the self as the self deems necessary for its organization, survival and health. At the same time, all that comprises the universe contributes to the self and comprises the self.

This description of an African self reflects, in its formulation, an African way of knowing. The circularity of the description reflects the processual nature of the self, its endlessness. There is a certain degree of complementarity between the thought of the African philosophers Kunene and Mbiti, that can be helpful to the African American in understanding, naming and reclaiming the vitality inherent in African American spirituality. For the African, according to Kunene, the world is a physical world; the earth is physical. It is perceived as round, circular. The end is not terminal; it is only the end of this cycle. The next cycle begins. If the end comes, it is only an illusion, only a transformation. Everything is in the process of transformation and change.¹⁷ Complementarily, Mbiti theorizes that there is a power or energy that permeates the universe, and of which God is the source and ultimate controller. The spirits, however, have some of it. Some human beings have access to the power as well, to use for the

¹⁶ Zahan, 9.

¹⁷ Kunene, 13.

good or ill of the community.¹⁸ In the African and the African American communities, witches, priests, shamans, psychic healers, mediums, psychotherapists and pastoral counselors all fit into this category. These human beings would experience this power or energy through the mind, according to Kunene. He describes the dynamic interaction as follows:

In order to know, it is necessary to reflect, to be prepared to know. A lot of things that are unknowable are because you admit they are unknowable. You enter into a region of terror that threatens your integration into the earth. For that reason, you must be prepared to go by degrees into that understanding of that other world. It is not hostile in that other world; it does not constitute irrational forces that are constantly terrorizing humankind.¹⁹

To enter into that world is to attain knowledge of the unknowable, which is the future. For the African, time is two-dimensional, past and present, a composition of events that have occurred and those that are occurring now. Those events that are likely to occur immediately, those events that have not taken place, and those events that have no likelihood of taking place are categorized as “notime.” Because these events have not taken place, they cannot constitute time. Time has to be experienced by the African in order to become a part of African reality.

The African does not calculate time in disconnection with events. It does not matter if the sun rises at five o’clock in the morning or at seven o’clock in the morning, as long as the sun rises. Traditionally, in African life, the people are not slaves to time; they make as much time as they want. The folk tale that follows illustrates how the concept of time pervades the reality of the African American.

God did not make folks all at once. He made folks sort of in His spare time. For instance, one day He had a little time on His hands, so He got the clay, seasoned it the way He wanted it, then He laid it by and went on to doing

¹⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 16.

¹⁹ Kunene,

something more important. Another day He had some spare moments, so He rolled it all out, and cut out the human shapes, and stood them all up against His long gold fence to dry while He did some important creating. The human shapes all got dry, and when He found the time, He blowed the breath of life in them. After that, from time to time, he would call everybody up, and give them spare parts. For instance, one day He called everybody and gave out feet and eyes. Another time He give out toe-nails that Old Maker figured they could use. Anyhow, they had all that they got up to now. So then one day He said, "Tomorrow morning, at seven o'clock sharp, I aim to give out color. Everybody be here on time. I got plenty of creating to do tomorrow, and I want to give out this color and get it over wid. Everybody be 'round de throne at seven o'clock tomorrow morning!"

So next morning at seven o'clock, God was sitting on His throne with His big crown on His head and seven suns circling around His head. Great multitudes was standing around the throne waiting to get their color. God sat up there and looked east, and He looked west, and He looked north and He looked Australia, and blazing worlds were falling off His teeth. So He looked over to his left and moved His hands over a crowd and said, "You's yellow people!" They all bowed low and said, "Thank you, God," and they went on off. He looked at another crowd, moved His hands over them and said, "You's red folks!" They made their manners and said, "Thank you, Old Maker," and they went on off. He looked towards the center and moved His hand over another crowd and said, "You's white folks!:" They bowed low and said, "Much obliged, Jesus," and they went on off. Then God looked way over to the right and said, "Look here, Gabriel, I miss a lot of multitudes from around the throne this morning." Gabriel looked too, and said, "Yessir, there's a heap of multitudes missing from 'round de throne this morning." So God sat there an hour and a half and waited. Then He called Gabriel and said, "Looka here, Gabriel, I'm sick and tired of this waiting. I got plenty of creating to do this morning. You go find them folks and tell 'em they better hurry on up here if they expect to get any color. Fool with me, and I won't give out no more."

So Gabriel run on off and started to hunting around. Way after while, he found the missing multitudes lying around on the grass by the Sea of Life, fast asleep. So Gabriel woke them up and told them, "You better get up from there and come on up to the throne and get your color. Old Maker is mighty wore out from waiting. Fool with Him and He won't give out no more color."

So as the multitude heard that, they all jumped up and went running towards the throne hollering, "Give us our color! We want our color! We got just as much right to color as anybody else." So when the first ones got to the throne, they tried to stop and be polite. But the ones coming on behind got to pushing and shoving so till the first ones got shoved all up against the throne so till the throne was careening all over to one side. So God said, "Here! Here! Git back! Git back!" But they was keeping up such a racket that they misunderstood Him, and thought He said, "Git black!" So they just got black, and kept the thing a-going.²⁰

²⁰ Hughes and Bontemps, 125.

This tale illustrates as well the pervasiveness of the African's concept of time into patterns of speech and behavior.

For the African American to enter into that other world is to acknowledge and to claim a substantial and critical part of one's African cultural heritage. To enter into that other world is to access a power and energy that lends to healing, health and human transformation.

For the pastoral caregiver, one has to risk, to dare to enter into this unknowable world of the African American client, to empathize with that world and its accoutrements as uncovered there, in order to give care in a way that would be healing for that client.

African American Self Theory

The collective image of African American citizens of the United States continues on a trajectory toward dis-ease, dysfunction, destruction, and violence, according to media representations. However, many within the African American community accept and integrate these representations of self into their being, in one form or another, and consequently fall prey to self-annihilative thought and behaviors that perpetuate these media stereotypes. The task of the African American community is to stem the cycle of dis-ease by garnering appropriate strategies and behaviors to instill foundations for the evolution of self-knowledge, self-will, self-respect and self-determination. To accomplish this basic task is to enter into life-giving and life-sustaining processes, such as love and compassion, which engender liberation and freedom, risk and transformation, and health and wholeness. African spirituality has been the centrifugal force that has undergirded the creativity, imagination and vision for survival and life through the Middle Passage, slave culture, Jim Crow laws and racism here in the United States. The

mediation of African reality and the reality that slaves encountered in the United States was borne out of the internal resources that they brought to these shores. It is safe to say that since the arrival of the African in America as slave, the African American community has necessarily embarked upon a quest for self; for self-theories, theologies, pedagogy and models of care that might be efficacious for health and healing.

Western psychiatry has not effectively incorporated the influence of culture on human development in developing theories and therapies for wholeness, thereby excluding African Americans from opportunities for healing in traditional settings of health care in the United States. However, psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, who formulated his theory of self circa the 1930s, '40s and '50s, did considerable work based on the significance of the cultural setting in influencing human development. Sullivan, whose primary discipline was psychiatry, sometimes spoke of himself as a social psychologist, particularly near the end of his life. Sullivan's self theory is helpful to the community as it strives to flourish within the context of both African and Western worldviews.

Sullivan worked out his theory of interpersonal relations over a period of twenty-five years. His theory is meant to apply to both the mentally healthy and the mentally ill. Mabel Cohen, psychiatric consultant to the Committee on Publication of Sullivan's Writings, states that the core of Sullivan's work can be described as the psychiatry of interpersonal relations, or as the study of communication between persons. Cohen goes on to say that Sullivan's theory rests on the propositions that: (1) a large part of mental disorder results from and is perpetuated by inadequate communication, the communicative processes being interfered with by anxiety; and (2) each person in any

two-person relationship is involved as a portion of an interpersonal field, rather than as a separate entity, in processes which affect and are affected by the field.²¹

Sullivan's approach recognizes that

the person, psychobiologically conceived, maintains organization, communal existence and functional activity in and within both the physicochemical and superorganic cultural universe. The study of the life course of the individual becomes more intelligible when personality is conceived as the hypothetical entity which manifests itself in interpersonal relations, the latter including interactions with other people, real or fancied, primarily or mediately integrated into dynamic complexes; and with traditions, customs, inventions and produced by humankind.²²

In Sullivan's theory, it seems that the function of an African concept of self is described as well. The language used in Sullivan's approach demythologizes the language that coheres to an African concept of self. The activity and interrelating in and within the physicochemical and superorganic cultural universe is analogous to the continuity and mobility that characterizes the relationship between the respective physical and metaphysical worlds of the African and the African American.

Sullivan's theory also allows for an understanding of mysticism that inheres within the African American culture and which pervades day to day activity. Mysticism is fundamental to the practice of religion in the Black Church--in the sense of experiencing the Ultimate Being as reality, not as an idea. Mystical experiences involve a sense of unity with the Ultimate as well as an identity of self that is distinct. Awareness is heightened; boundaries are transcended. The dynamic process that produces a mystical experience is an inner one, spontaneous and unforced. My description of mysticism

²¹ Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, xii.

²² Harry Stack Sullivan, quoted in Patrick Mullahy, "Non-Freudian Analytic Theories" in

stems in part from my personal experiences and from experiences that I have witnessed in the Black Church. According to writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, the “shouting” that is done in the church is a survival of the African concept of possession by the gods. Hurston defines “shouting” as a sign of special favor from the spirit that chooses to drive out individual consciousness temporarily and use the body for its expression.²³ “Shouting” for the African American is an interaction with the spirit through tradition. Psychology’s validation of spiritualism and mysticism could lead to a reframing, re-evaluation and subsequent reclaiming of that African reality for the African American in which the hope of healing and wholism inheres.

Sullivan came to see that the preservation of self-esteem is one of the most powerful determinants of human behavior, with the concomitant necessity of warding off any threats to this preservation, failure of which leads to anxiety. In Sullivan’s view, the self-system has at its disposal an instrumentality that one unwittingly employs to limit and restrict awareness, namely, “selective inattention.” The major function of selective inattention, operating in the service of the individual’s self, is to restrict awareness of experience to what is congenial to it or at least tolerable. The more one has been exposed to the irrational and non-understandable prescriptions, the more restrictive the self tends to be,²⁴ meaning that, if in the course of one’s upbringing, one has been chronically subjected to severe anxiety in connection with one’s behavior, selective inattention will be employed more extensively. The effects of systemic racism, generally, are anxiety-producing.

Benjamin B. Wolman, ed., Handbook of Clinical Psychology, ed. Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), 365.

²³ Zora Neale Hurston, The Sanctified Church (Berkeley: Turtle Island Press, 1983), 91.

²⁴ Patrick Mullahy, “Non-Freudian Analytic Theories,” in Handbook of Clinical Psychology, ed.

Because the nature of racism is insidious and covert, many African Americans can be lulled into an artificial or false sense of security. Self-esteem is lowered nonetheless as it becomes increasingly difficult for many well-qualified African Americans to obtain meaningful employment for reasons that are not apparent. In other words, the anxiety produced by systemic racism may lead to selective inattention.

There are many parallels to be made between Sullivan's theories of self and an African theory of self that cannot be addressed within the scope of this dissertation. Sullivan's theories provide fertile bases upon which the African American can begin to re-evaluate one's own heritage and extract those tools within that heritage that lend to the esteem of self.

Self Theory toward Reclamation of an African American Self

The life of the African American in the United States is indeed a violent life. One is thrust into places and situations as a natural consequence of living, which requires of one, seemingly, a giving up of a piece of oneself.

The experiences of the African American are reflected throughout history--in slave narratives, in literature (both prose and poetry) in personal stories, and embedded in oral history. They are tales of rape, floggings, hangings, of forcible separation of families and of relegation to the status of educated handmaiden and manservant to their European American counterpart, to name a few. The realities in the daily existence of the African American escalate the level of terror and tension that one encounters in mediating the faces of one's life in the world. Yet, amid this violence, the expectation is to emerge as a whole human being.

Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 366.

The faces of the African American are many and varied. They are faces that reflect different times, different spaces, different places. They are faces that reflect the pain, rage, torment, and also the exhilaration, joy and peace that are inextricably interwoven with their care and love of the earth. They are faces of different hues; dark chocolate, coconut, high yellow, brown, almost white. African Americans are different individuals, separate and distinct. Yet they are one, all connected, with the blood of Africa pulsing through their veins. It is the blood of Africa which gives rise to the complex spirit that inhabits the African American. It is this complex spirit which relegates one to lone places where many others fear to enter. Many times, the African American chooses not to tread these treacherous grounds. Whatever choices the African American makes existentially, one is often left without a framework to experience one's own feelings and emotions. The African American experiences the vulnerability and weariness that accompany the historical and cultural reality of life in the United States.

Given the complexities with which the life of the African American is fraught, how does one mediate one's existence in the world to the extent that one emerges whole, seemingly intact? Many questions arise from within this context as one seeks to make meaning for oneself and one's world. How does one define oneself as a human being? What are the principles that undergird stability and from what bases do they arise? What is one's vision of God or other higher power?

Who We Are in the Light of Creation

God created man in the image of himself,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.²⁵

²⁵ Genesis 1:27, NJB.

The African American, as well as all humankind, must have a concept of God or another higher power in order to conceive of who we are. And in the arrogance of humankind, the God or higher power that we create or conceive, for our own sake and for the sake of religion, is in the image of us.²⁶ For some of us, particularly those who operate within misogynistic and patriarchal structures, universal truth is manufactured and applied across the board, imposed upon many, despite who we are and what our context or situation may be.

A task of theology is to create parameters and boundaries, structure, a framework within which we can live successfully in the world; within which we can live with one another; within which we can be fully who we are. That task belongs conjointly to the Church and the community. We explicate what we believe around such issues as homosexuality, sin, redemption and grace based on our interpretation of scripture, our traditions, reason and experience.

The Black Church in the United States was created during the time of slavery in the United States out of a need for survival for the slave, a need for a framework--physically, spiritually, and theologically--within which, Black Africans brought to these shores could envision and effect freedom and wholeness. The Black Church served as well as a bastion of hope for Black Africans in America, for here one's voice could be raised, to a degree. Harold Carter states,

The Slaves' lives in the New World were rigidly predetermined from "sunup" to "sundown." However, from "sundown" to "sunup" they did have some moments of creating and recreating themselves in light of their existence.²⁷

²⁶ Matthew Fox, Original Blessing (Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1983).

²⁷ Harold Carter, The Prayer Tradition of Black People (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), 22.

Religion is an integral part of African cultural heritage and can be found in all areas of human life. Mbiti, African theologian, says,

It has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities. We can say, therefore, that religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life. While at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well.²⁸

Throughout the history of the African American in the United States, one of the more stable elements within the African American culture has been its religious expression. Its communal and wholistic perspectives which were indigenous to native African culture were a tremendous resource and source of strength for the people toward survival. As Africans were brought to this country as slaves, many of their religious and cultural practices were maintained despite the vicissitudes of life brought on by the conditions of slavery. As the African was exposed to Christianity by the slave owners, many aspects of African religious expression were integrated into this “new” religion. Raboteau affirms,

The gods of Africa were carried in the memories of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. To be sure, they underwent a sea change. African liturgical seasons, prescribed rituals, traditional myths, and languages of worship were attenuated, replaced, and altered, or lost. Still, much remained, and particularly in Latin America the gods lived on in the beliefs and rituals of the slaves’ descendants. *Candomble* in Brazil, *Santeria* in Cuba, *shango* in Trinidad, and *vaudou* in Haiti, all attest to the vitality and durability of African religious perspectives.²⁹

These perspectives continue to be such a resource to the present time. Moreover, the plight of the slave necessitated a place that was private and sacred, where Eurocentric ideals were peripheral. The African American Church became that arena. The Church became a place for nurture and healing, for venting frustrations and plotting routes of

²⁸ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 9.

²⁹ Raboteau, 16.

escape. The Church was a place for giving praise to God, for instilling hope; it was a place where the African American could envision liberation, salvation and wholeness. The Church is also termed the “invisible Church” because the slaves initially had no edifices within which to practice their religion. The “brand” of Christianity that was available to them through their masters frequently consisted of sermons urging them to be docile and obedient. Even when a slave preacher was available to the slaves, the plantation overseer would stand over him to make sure that he preached the same as the master’s preacher did; he was afraid to preach differently. For the slaves to experience authentic worship, a secret and sacred place was necessary, so they found these places deep in the woods, taking care not to be discovered by their master, for fear that they would be severely punished. Raboteau states,

From the abundant testimony of fugitive and freed slaves it is clear that the slave community had an extensive religious life of its own, hidden from the eyes of the master. In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbors (“hush arbors”) the slaves made Christianity truly their own.³⁰

To make Christianity their own, the slaves had to rely on the religious practices that were a part of their African culture. Because the African worldview does not acknowledge a dichotomy between the material and spiritual areas of life, Africans are open to constant communication between these two realities. This is manifested in many dissociative experiences that obtain in African culture, i.e., ecstasy, trance, divination, spirit possession and shamanism. For example, from the Shona tribe in Southern Africa,

Each tribal spirit is supposed to select one person as its medium or host through whom it makes known its views and demands to the people. As he becomes possessed, the medium begins to shake vigorously and behaves as if he is in a trance or hypnotic state.... Possession is hastened by appropriate music and is preceded by extensive muscular contractions with rapid to-and-fro movements of the head and limbs. The medium is said to be incapable of

³⁰ Raboteau, 212.

recalling what he says during this trance. When possession is complete, all the preliminary contractions cease, and the medium behaves normally, although every now and then he may grunt or emit long sighs.

When the spirit leaves, the medium again begins to shudder, yawn, and stretch out his arms as if in flight. Occasionally, these actions are so intense that he falls to the ground in a state of exhaustion. Nor does he fast before the ceremony, as has been suggested, in order to induce a state of hypoglycemia. Possession is so frequent an occurrence that it can be expected at almost any ritual ceremony---among both men and women.³¹

Many of these dissociative experiences were practiced in the churches of the slaves, away from the presence of the masters. Slaves were often flogged with their backs being pickled afterwards for engaging in religious services. In order to withstand the pain of the flogging, one often had to absent oneself from the experience at hand, escape mentally and spiritually into another reality, dissociate from the present. This exemplifies what Sullivan called "selective inattention." Slaves persisted in the practice of their culture and religion because at this point in their lives, the need for effective defense systems to withstand the shattering experiences of slavery had become a prevailing need. Literary scholar, Angelo Costanzo, referring to this need of the slaves, points out, that,

They had already been given a strong foundation in the African religious concepts during their formative years, and later they continued to be aware of their early beliefs as they associated with other African slaves in the Western world. We can understand why the spiritual tribal beliefs were strongly cherished by the captives when we remember that all young, kidnapped blacks were separated forever from their parents and all other immediate and extended family members in Africa. The slaves were also separated from the vital links to their ancestors, who occupy an important role in the African religious system of beliefs. These forced disconnections were traumatic events in the lives of the captured blacks because African social structure is based on the spiritual association with the ancestors, especially with the authoritative fathers who in death possess mystical powers over the sons.³²

³¹Michael Gelfand, "Psychiatric Disorders as Recognized by the Shona," in Magic, Faith and Healing, ed. Ari Kiev (New York: Free Press of Glencoe; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1964), 162.

³²Angelo Costanzo, Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 23.

In reference to the slave masters, one ex-slave reported, “Most of them thought that when colored people were praying it was against them. For they would catch them praying for God to lift things out of their way and the white folks would *lift them* [original emphasis].”³³ The slaves preferred their own meetings; they could pray and sing and conduct ceremonies as they saw fit, according to their own beliefs. These religious practices that the slaves adhered to are legacy to the Black Church today. The concept of “shouting” that Hurston speaks about is done in some African American churches today; it is considered a sacred practice. In Africa, shouting was confined to the domain of the priesthood. In America, its domain has become more generalized and extends to laypersons as well. In some Black churches, “shouting” has evolved to praise dancing; at that point, “shouting” is no longer an experience of possession.

The church, then, provided a haven for the African American as slave, as emancipated slave, and for African Americans in racist America as well. The Black Church has been assigned by history the irrefutable task of creating a safe space for its citizens. African Americans’ understanding of who God is, is contextualized in suffering, strife and struggle--a common heritage for Africans in the diaspora. But is the church fulfilling its task of creating a framework that is viable for all seeking refuge? In many aspects, most assuredly so; the Church allows for the “gathered community” to have authentic communication with God and with each other; elements inherent in the oral traditions of Africa are practiced without judgment or evaluation by Europeans or Americans; moreover, the Word of God is heard in the particularity of context of African Americans, i.e., with a message of hope. Although these traditions and legacies abound in the Church today, the efficacy of these traditions for health and well-being and indeed

³³ Raboteau, 214.

for survival has diminished throughout the generations. These traditions and values have been transmitted throughout the centuries to each generation without transmission, to a large extent, of the significance and meaning of said values for survival and wholeness. Moreover, the lack of integration of these values into the self lends to a façade of superficiality; stasis sets in, dynamism diminishes, as well as the transformative character of these traditions. Thus, the African American is in need of a new religious paradigm, of theology that is not only theoretical, but which can be mediated and reflected as praxis. The African American has been victimized by the Black Church's reluctance to reform itself, to engage in self critique. With the structure of hierarchy in male leadership, the African American Church is oppressive to African American females in their quest of leadership in the Church as well. Jacquelyn Grant challenges Black theology and the Black Church to realize its own proclamation of liberation as the central message of the gospel by extending this principle to African American women. Grant asserts,

If the liberation of women is not proclaimed, the church's proclamation cannot be about divine liberation. If the church does not share in the liberation struggle of Black women, its liberation struggle is not authentic. If the women are oppressed, the church cannot possibly be a "visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality"---for the gospel cannot be real in that context.³⁴

Grant notes, as well, that the criticism that Liberation theology makes against classical theology, that is, that these theologies have been used to legitimate the established order, has been turned against Liberation theology itself. In Liberation theologies, where racism is rejected, sexism is embraced; where classism is called into question, racism and sexism have been tolerated; and where sexism is repudiated, racism

³⁴ Jacquelyn Grant, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Theology and Womanist Response (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 205.

and classism are often ignored. Grant posits that the tripartite oppression of racism, classism and sexism are elements that often exist in both classical and Black theologies.³⁵ It is the strict adherence to the order, framework, boundaries, and structure that we set, which, when so rigidly sustained, gives way to power over, to oppression, to violence and violation.

Classical theologies are Christian theologies arising out of Eurocentric thought and dualistic paradigms. They are not inclusive models and they have dominated theological thought for centuries. They are models that are oppressive and are not relational to many peoples, yet these are the models that the church sustains for its people. Liberation theologies have arisen out of the context of the freedom struggles of peoples of Third World countries and origins. How, then, can rising theologies steer clear of the critique of being oppressive, violent, as Liberation theology itself has so been critiqued?

A response to this question is steeped in the dualistic nature which inheres in theological paradigms; not so much in the dualistic nature itself as much as in how the dichotomies are mediated and that the dichotomies are mediated. For duality inheres in all things in God's creation...in the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them.

The term *dualism* evinces a conceptualization of separateness; a dichotomous nature. In our traditional western theologies, as we posit mind over body, male over female, material over spiritual, we espouse the opposite of what the creation scriptures tell us. We often find great difficulty in conceptualizing paradox. The task of

³⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman," in Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979, ed. Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 206.

conceptualizing paradox involves a process of mediation. To mediate, according to Webster's dictionary, is to "bring about ...to settle, ...reconcile."³⁶ My addition to the definition is "to balance," which is an art. To mediate involves a state of being which allows one to perceive and conceive of the wholeness, of things and beings, including the potential of things and beings, i.e., to envision. As one envisions, and as this vision is integrated into one's physical or material reality, the potential for wholeness and healing, for being, is actualized. Balance is achieved in that moment.

A basic premise of this construction is that in order for personal freedom, transformation, liberation, healing and wholeness to occur, every aspect of our being must be in a processual state of reconceptualization. There must be a dynamic, interactive, flowing process within all creation, including the literal earth. Within each era and for each peoples, if so engaged, one's theology is in a constant state of mediation, steering clear of stasis, having less potential for staying in the snare of oppression, violence, violation and more potential for living within the tension of paradox, the both/and.

In Jesus' teaching about the law, he says,

Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them.³⁷

The implication of this passage is that Jesus was engaged in a dynamic process of reconceptualization, an interactive, mediative process. This bible verse reflects the paradoxical nature of Jesus' thought and praxis. He was constantly being challenged by the Pharisees regarding his teachings; for God had given them these laws by which the

³⁶ Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, s. v. "mediate."

³⁷ Matt. 5:17, NJB.

society was to live, laws validated by the prophets. With Jesus' interpretations of the Scriptures, the fluidity of the laws was emphasized, drawing attention to the space created for transformation, change and inclusivity. The crucifixion of Jesus signifies the terror that exists at the level of both change and resistance; the considerable risk involved in transformative and liberative activity.

Sally McFague, theologian, in Models of God, makes the case for new paradigms and new sensibilities. For our sensibilities, that is, most who live and exist in the modern world, are violated by the stilted character and nature of the Eurocentric theologies that church and society adhere to, and which form the basis for the paradigms that order our societies. Further, these paradigms are declared by the dominant culture to be salvific for humanity. For African Americans, for African American women and all women in general, for homosexuals, and peoples of Third World origins, these theologies do not lend to liberative and transformative processes or praxis. These segments of society are rife with those who struggle to exist in the modern world with an acceptable sense of whom they are. It is imperative that new models of theology, new theories of the self, indeed, new sensibilities emerge if this society is to sustain itself and not die. McFague states,

The constructive character of theology must be acknowledged, and this becomes of critical importance when the world is profoundly different from the world in which many of the traditional metaphors and concepts gained currency. Theologians must think experimentally, must risk novel constructions in order to be theologians for our time [original emphasis].³⁸

I contend that the processual, paradoxical nature of duality inheres within an African worldview and subsequently, within an African American worldview. Within such a

³⁸ Sally McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 6.

worldview, mobility, fluidity is a way of life. Such a movement allows for a reconceptualization of all things for our time, as McFague suggests. Kunene emphasizes that the ancient Egyptians were one such people who understood that one's spiritual well-being emanates from the integration of one's knowledge of the physical and metaphysical worlds. Preoccupation with one world over the other leads to disequilibrium. The ideal of equilibrium leads to the idea that both negative and positive aspects obtain within all normal existence. Kunene sees these aspects, negative and positive realities, as being in a complementary relationship, neither dominating or opposing the other. The physical reality is known to us because we exist in a physical reality, however, existence must consist of the known and the unknown—the physical and the metaphysical, with the unknown being a larger extension of our known reality.³⁹

The African American embraces Africanness---the responsibility, the ethical concern to care for the earth, to care for one another. In the day to day violence and violation encountered by the African American, one makes decisions for the good of the community. It is the ethical concern of one to care for the gift of the earth, to meet the physical needs of the community, the church, the other. This concern is reflected in patterns of behavior of those within the small, segregated, racist community in which I was raised. When any head of household, male or female, was out of work, there were forays into gardens, pantries and smokehouses for food to be taken, primarily by the children of caring households directly to the head of the households in need---in small packages, unobtrusively. No words of explanation were spoken except to say, "Mama sent this." Because we children were the carriers of these gifts, we also knew without

³⁹ Kunene, 10.

speaking that this was a way of being in life. This mission was a means of transmitting that value.

Stories such as these proliferate within African American communities. From my own experience: oratory is integral in the lives of Africans, therefore, in the African American community, competitions were held annually in order to cultivate and perfect this skill. As a freshman in high school, I placed first in our local oratorical contest, which would permit me to travel to the Alabama state level competition to vie for a sizable monetary reward. The second place winner, however, was a senior in high school, who was preparing to go away to college in the fall with the blessings of the community. I was approached by the principal of the school and my advisors of the contest to discuss their acknowledgement and their appreciation of my hard work and skill and to discuss as well this senior student's need for the prize money to be used toward her college tuition. I made the decision to relinquish my position in order for this senior student to compete---for the good of the community. This decision was not only the only one I could make for my own salvation, but it was the decision that I was expected by my community to make as well. I can remember my own surge of pain and anger at my honor being taken away while being filled with a source of pride at having contributed to the earth, to the community. I was rendered silent by the ambivalence, with no one to whom I would dare speak except to my own mother, who never scolded me for having made that decision but who expressed, only to me, her feelings of anger that they never came to her, the mother of this girl child, to make this request. She, too, was rendered silent, invisible. There were no tears, but we made homemade ice cream

together. We laughed. It was our secret. We were in community, in solidarity; African Americans in community, in solidarity.

This was often the case for African Americans, to gather in community, to be in community, sharing secrets from the world outside, the world that had been placed on the periphery. We are laughing in that community, sometimes crying together, dancing at the meeting of the Progressive Matrons' Garden and Social Club every Wednesday evening, at the meeting of the Knights of Pythias Fraternal Organization; sitting around the quilting rack, the women telling secrets of how she spat in the soup she was making at Miss Ann's house every time she thought about the hard work she put in for the three dollars a day she earned cleaning this white mistress' house; every time she thought about having to leave a cold breakfast for her child so she could be on time to make a hot breakfast for Miss Ann's children, a breakfast that they sometimes did not even eat.

An old song sung in the old juke joints, a bawdy house where African Americans drink, gamble and dance, characterizes distinctions in the experiences of the African American woman and the white woman:

Oh de white gal rides in a Cadillac.
De yaller gal rides the same,

Black gal rides in a rusty Ford
but she gets dere just the same.⁴⁰

The experiences of the African American woman and the White woman are so distinctly different that it can account for problematic relationships between them today.

As slave, the African American woman was not given the protection of white patriarchy. She, in fact, was treated as brutally by her mistress as by her master. Grant

⁴⁰ Hurston, 64.

postulates that the African American woman's experience involves a convergence of racism, sexism, and classism. She notes that within the arena of domestic labor, the sexist assumption that this is a woman's place is confirmed, as well as the classist practice of paying little or nothing for such work. Further, there is the racist assumption that white women need protection from the actual work and should function in a supervisory capacity. Grant quotes bell hooks in Feminist Theory:

Many Black women experienced white women as the white supremacist group who most directly exercised power over them, often in a manner more brutal and dehumanizing than that of racist white men. (Even) today, despite predominate rule by white supremacist patriarchs, Black women often work in a situation where the immediate supervisor, boss, or authority is a white woman.⁴¹

Renita Weems, in Just A Sister Away, recounts a personal experience of being invited by a group of white women to join in planning a national symposium that reflected multiethnicity. Weems admits to being suspicious of requests for services on the basis of her blackness and tries to avoid being the only black in otherwise all white situations. This suspicion or feeling is a common one among African Americans. As Weems aptly puts it, it portends danger. The danger is embedded in the status of being placed in the position as spokesperson for an entire race as if it engages in monolithic behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes. Despite Weems' ambivalent feelings, she accepted the invitation to be a part of this group, a group who accepted the suggestion of Weems and the one other African American woman present for the theme of the symposium. However, neither woman was invited to attend or participate in any further sessions. Weems' response was that she walked around hurt and enraged, berating herself for

⁴¹ Grant, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus, 198, quoting bell hooks, Feminist Theory from Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

betraying her instincts. Each time she saw announcements for the symposium with her title, she wanted to scream.⁴²

Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf,⁴³ depicts relationships between the African American woman with a dominant society and with her man as well. Women moaned and groaned aloud collectively with the actresses at productions of the piece around the country. For Shange masterfully exposed the viscera of these relationships. The often brutal physical and psychological strain of the African American in these relationships was exposed.

The piece was cathartic for many an African American, particularly for African American women, because Shange knew who she was--an African American woman, and because Shange knew, then the whole world could know who she is, the whole of her. Though Shange focused on male/female relationships, social commentary on society's treatment of the African American in general is noted within the verses of her choreopoem.

The experiences of the African American male in society have reflected brutality and dehumanization of personhood in stark unabashed boldness by the white patriarchal society from slavery to the present time. The whippings, hangings and castration of male slaves are well-documented in the annals of history, as are the clandestine activities of the Ku Klux Klan terrorizing African Americans with cross-burnings, even the burning of the entire town of Rosewood, Mississippi. Lynchings, shootings and intimidation continue in

⁴² Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 8.

⁴³ Ntozake Shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1977).

the present. When I was a child of eleven, in 1955, I remember vividly the newspaper stories and the pictures in Ebony and Jet magazines, a Black monthly and weekly, respectively, of fourteen year old Emmett Till, who had been brutally beaten and dumped into a river and drowned, having been accused of whistling at a forty-something year-old white woman. The young man was a resident of Chicago who was visiting relatives in a small town in Mississippi. No one was ever convicted of this crime. As a child, I remember as well the trauma and fear that gripped my African American playmates and myself in my small southern community; we all knew that we were susceptible to the same treatment.

Although approximately fifty years have passed since this incident, as recently as 2003, a young African American journalist did sufficient research to warrant the district attorney's reopening of the case.

The stories throughout the lives of African Americans are phenomenal stories, for they depict experiences that plumb the depth of one's soul until they reach one's God place. These stories are visceral. They reflect concreteness, physicalness, realness. Their stories are not pleasant stories, yet they beg to be heard.

Goodrich-Dunn, the reviewer of the books of Alice Miller, says this of Miller:

Alice Miller's books are neither pleasant nor easy to read. She is the messenger of bad tidings. She requires us to look at the ugly, the dark and the dirty. She tells us that we must not flit off into false transcendence, but face the unfaceable. Only by confronting the blacker realities of personal history, she says, can original wholeness be found.⁴⁴

In light of the description of Miller's works, the experience of the African

⁴⁴ Barbara Goodrich-Dunn, "Protesting Hidden Violence: Alice Miller's Impact on Psychotherapy, Common Boundary, May/June 1987, 22.

American can be likened unto it. The language that Goodrich-Dunn uses in her description is fraught with the language used to characterize the American experiences of the African American, which is ironic. The dictionary defines irony as “the use of language with one meaning for a privileged audience and another for those addressed or concerned.”⁴⁵ My construct, then, for the African American within the context of violence and violation that define the African American experience in the United States would be as follows: The African American’s experience is neither pleasant nor easy to read. One’s life is a message of bad tidings. African Americans are required to look at the ugly, the dark, and the dirty from day to day. One cannot flit off into false transcendence, but must face the unfaceable. For it is only by confronting the blacker realities of one’s personal history does the African American find personal wholeness. The worldview of the African continent is a basic and primary element that African Americans must examine in order to reclaim self.

There are two common threads throughout the stories of African Americans. One is the secret places to which they retreat. Both places are communal places. One of these places is very concrete and consists of the physical community and symbols. And those who dare to enter, may. Often African American women greet one another with “girl friend” or “sistah”; African American men greet one another with “brotha” or an elaborate symbolic handshake. This signifies membership in that community where secrets are known. Those greetings signify the bond that gives rise to an agency or empowerment that is motivated by external, physical forces.

The other secret place is a personal place existentially, a place to which one retreats alone, seemingly, and gives way to community as transcendence happens. This is

⁴⁵ The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide, 1999 ed., s. v. “irony.”

the God-place to which one is plummeted by the impact of the violence and violation in everyday life. This assertion suggests that the African American is not so strong as a natural characteristic of one's being; it further suggests that one has been forced to this God-place so consistently, simply by the nature of one's existence, that one knows this place. The African American knows the nature of what is encountered there. This God-place is one's home. And by one's very Africanness, one is a physical person as well, so that the church, the building, becomes home as well.

The second common thread in these stories is the confrontation of the realities, whether that confrontation is done in a public or private forum. One cannot delude oneself in this confrontation, for one encounters one's god in this place as well. Community with God gives rise to one's religion. That confrontation in this personal place determines the shape of one's religion, the shape of one's expression. What then, accounts for the survival, the perseverance, the coming through of African Americans in light of the violence and violation encountered in everyday life. How does one maintain a sense of self, of personhood?

In keeping with an African worldview, in which the world, the earth, is a physical entity perceived as circular, the end is not terminal, it is only an illusion, only a transformation. Everything is in the process of transformation and change.

Tom Feelings' characterization of African American women reflects as well the connection that African American men have with Africa, as he writes in his introduction in Now Sheba Sings the Song. In this book, Feelings illustrates Maya Angelou's poem with drawings of African American women.

I worked sepia tones into the drawings and tried to bring them all together as a group...The sepia...shows that no matter what color they really are or

what features they possess, no matter what the form, the context, the spirit, woman inside these women reflects the continent of Africa.⁴⁶

In the African American's embrace of the ethical concern for the earth, one is often left without a framework to experience one's own emotion. Instead, one develops something that the earth needs, whether the "earth" manifests as one's community, a Eurocentric society, or one's church. In turn, the "earth" loves the African American as it loves itself, but not always in the way that one needs to be loved. In developing what the "earth" needs, the African American may be prevented, throughout one's life, from being oneself. Psychoanalyst Alice Miller poses this concept of behavior as the dynamic that accompanies sexual violation of the child and which silences the child.⁴⁷ With this silence of the African American, whether it is a forced silence or whether it is self-imposed as a coping mechanism, the African American is left with feelings of ambivalence toward the "other," which sets up a tension that becomes a constant in one's life. This ambivalence encumbers one's decision-making process. For the African American, this concept of the dynamics of one's behavior marks the violence/violation by the earth and one's participation in the violence/violation. The potential for liberation lies in the face of the mediative process between the dualisms in one's realities, one's experiences, internal and external realities. What and where is the face of God in this experience? Indeed, who is God? Does God exist within the face of violence and violation?

⁴⁶ Tom Feelings, introduction to Now Sheba Sings the Song by Maya Angelou (New York: E. P. Dutton, Dial Books, 1987).

⁴⁷ Alice Miller, The Drama of the Gifted Child, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 14-21.

To confront one's face, which for the African American, is to confront the face of God, is indeed to be thrust into a place of terror; is to threaten the very ground of one's being, as one has constructed it.

The cloud covered the mountain and the glory of Yahweh settled on the mountain of Sinai; for six days the cloud covered it, and on the seventh day Yahweh called to Moses from inside the cloud. To the eyes of the sons of Israel the glory of Yahweh seemed like a devouring fire on the mountaintop.⁴⁸

The African American chooses many times not to participate in the mountaintop experience.

Throughout the life of the African American, a violated and violent life, a central question recurs, emanating from one's experiences--does one dare hope that one may transcend one's brokenness, to experience the reality of God and participate in one's own healing? The response to this question must arise from one's experiences, one's context, as well, a choice. More often than not, for the African American, the choice is a question of survival.

For theology, theories and therapies to become viable, to have relevancy and efficacy in the quest for meaning for the African American, the potential for experiencing the queendom/kingdom of God has to be recovered. The experience of that moment is an intersubjective one, which has to be named, described, claimed by the African American, and shared in community for healing/queendom/kingdom building to occur.

Seeing the Face of the Divine

There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Exod. 24:16, JB.

⁴⁹ Luke 12:32, NJB.

The question becomes, what is the face of mediation that facilitates access to the healing moment? The first and primary component of mediation is to live, to be confronted with life itself and its concomitant pains and joys, failures and successes; all that life is.

An understanding of the self is contextual. That understanding does not evolve outside of one's circumstances or situation in life. That context has to be acknowledged and accepted as part of whom one is, no value judgment, no condemnation, simply, as "is." Orlando Costas, missiologist, offers that the word "context"

represents a conceptual category. It refers to the time-space boundary of understanding. The context is the stage where all comprehension takes place. It is the reality that ties together and shapes all knowledge. The context involves both the presuppositions and the settings of understanding and communication. It refers not only to all the baggage people bring with them when they share and interpret reality to one another, but also to the situation wherein they reflect upon their practice.⁵⁰

Costas' concept of the word "context" is helpful in understanding the world or reality of the African American whose context consists of, to a large extent, an historical oppression, first, as a result of institutionalized slavery, then, after the abolition of slavery, systemic racism. If this context is acknowledged and accepted by the individual and the individual's community, then that acknowledgement or acceptance becomes a gift from an affirming community, including oneself, that fuels and facilitates this dynamic of healing, and thereby, another essential component of the healing moment.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the last component of the healing moment is differentiation, which characterizes an internal process of mediation which I have termed "passion/compassion." The passion is whatever feeling, behavior, face---anger, anxiety,

⁵⁰ Orlando Costas, Christ Outside the Gate: Mission beyond Christendom (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 4.

fear, etc---that arises out of one's self and all that one brings with it, one's context. One's passion points one toward one's true self, one's God-self. The compassion arises from one's true self, which is a communal self, comprised of, in Sullivan's language, interactions with other people, real or fancied, and with traditions, customs, inventions and institutions produced by humankind. Zahan's language is that the African carries within, physiologically and psychically, spirits of those who have gone before and those who are to come. Again, both Sullivan's and Zahan's concepts are analogous to the continuity and mobility that characterize the relationship between the physical and metaphysical worlds of the African and the African American. This mobility and continuity allow for the transcendence into the realm of compassion, which is a gift of the Spirit, an act of grace, despite one's context. One is free to choose, free will, whether to remain in the realm of passion or transcend into the realm of compassion. Given that transcendence is processual, and stasis may occur at any point along the continuum between the realms of passion and compassion, each point along the continuum will determine what one's face, one's behavior, will look like in the world to the world at that point.

If the passion overwhelms the compassion, the potential for doing evil is greater. Passion often yields conflict, both internal and external, a fertile field for mediation. However, if the dualism that is inherent within passion is mediated in a manner that isolates the ego (driven by the feelings of fear, anxiety, anger that arise and is one's context), then community is lost, which deprives the healing moment of an essential component. Matthew Fox, in A Spirituality Named Compassion, has termed "control" as the polar opposite of compassion, and deems competition, compulsion and dualism, as

properties of control. He considers these three properties as psychological obstacles to compassion.⁵¹

If the compassion overwhelms the passion, the potential for doing good is greater. In the realm of compassion, one accesses the communal self, the God-self, which contains the potential for healing, salvation and wholeness. In that place, God, self, and the earth interact. We are interrelated in that place; we are one and we are all. Thomas Merton says, “the whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all living things, which are part of one another.”⁵²

In the moment that the African American enters into this realm and knows this realm, one uncovers, discovers a depth in relationship that creates, is creative, and gifts of the self emanate that transcend the constraints of brokenness, dis-ease, life. One is added unto. There is a moment within that place into which one enters, that resonates within the lifeblood of one’s being; that unleashes passion, yielding compassion, which compels one to risk. It is a realm in which one can be whom one is. It is a healing moment. It is in that moment, face to face, that one knows that one is God’s own child; that one knows who God is. One experiences the queendom/kingdom of God. This is the essence of African/African American spirituality.

However, if the mediation between passion/compassion is unbalanced in any given moment and remains in a static, undynamic state, then the potential for evil emanates from the place of both/and. Stasis is the key element in this interaction; it sets

⁵¹ Matthew Fox, A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village: Humpty Dumpty and Us (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 68-69.

⁵² Fox cites the words of Thomas Merton, mystic, taken from his final talk, delivered two hours before his death. This is a quote on the dedication page of the book, A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us.

the stage for the point of healing to occur. When the mediation between passion/compassion becomes static and remains static, the potential for evil is heightened and healing does not occur in that moment. For the potential for evil to lessen, dynamism must heighten. In other words, the potential for evil is always present, has a function as catalyst in the healing process and is an essential component of African/African American spirituality.

Conclusion

New paradigms for ministry are imperative. New paradigms for constructive theology and Christology are imperative. The Black Church, long a central and critical organizing force and influence in the African American community, must be at the forefront of change for the African American community. Identifying and naming the gods that we serve are critical to a viable, vital, dynamic life. Our models and strategies must provide for access to the creativity inherent within our cultural context. The face of the model must constantly change, for contexts are constantly changing.

For any model or theory of care to be healing and transformative for the African American community in the United States, that model or theory, must, fundamentally, be Africentric, with African/African American spirituality at its center. Secondly, said theory must acknowledge, recognize and incorporate cultural determinants and their influence on human development in the construction of these theories.

In the particular theory espoused in this section, there are four themes -- contextuality, confrontation, community, and differentiation -- that are fundamental to a theory that is relevant and functional. These themes are analogous to way stations on a path to healing. I will elaborate on these themes in the following chapter. They all

contribute to dynamism, life, and process; ultimately, they are connectors to the presence of the community of the Ultimate Being, the source of our wisdom.

CHAPTER 5

AN EXPLICATION OF THEMES OF HEALING WITHIN AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SELF THEORY

There are specific themes inherent within this construction of a theory of healing and restoration of self...intrinsic themes, which, when given short shrift, can become an impediment to one's healing process and recovery of self. The construction of this work is based on the premise that Africans were brought to this land with a worldview intact. An understanding of that worldview is necessary in order to appreciate the capacity of Africans living on the continent as well as Africans living in America today, that is, African Americans, to survive in a system as brutal and dehumanizing as are the experiences and consequences of slavery, segregation and racism in the United States of America, as well as colonialism in Africa.

The African thought systems that I have described in previous chapters are, more or less, in reference to fundamental aspects of the worldview and do not attempt to describe the numerous varieties of philosophical beliefs that exist among African peoples. That task is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is important to understand, as well, that such philosophical and cosmological beliefs contribute predominantly toward African American survival. There is a large variety of representations of philosophical and religious beliefs, which are subject to change, depending upon the imperative acting upon African culture. Primary among these imperatives are "a. natural growing crisis of resources, b. the need to reorganize society to meet the growing crises."¹ The entire experience of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the institution of slavery

¹ Kunene, 22.

in the United States, the era of legal segregation and the racism that has ensued would correspond to the definition of “growing crises.” Therefore, it is highly possible that persons, African Americans, who adhere to a particular worldview can choose representations in the reorganization of society to meet the growing crises of slavery and still remain basically linked to their parent system.

There is an underlying tenet to African thought systems that no dichotomies exist in the universe; that all life is interrelated. Everything in life affects everything else; everything else affects everything, in some manner. The systems of domination and oppression that abide within the dominant culture of the United States are rife with dualisms that allow for justification of numerous ills that are heaped upon this society, the treatment of the African American simply being one of those ills. Like many other societies of the world, our society is in need of healing, healing for those who perpetrate these ills and for those perpetrated upon. We are all victims and we are all oppressors, even within the realm of the same dynamic, the same experience. Oppression, violence and domination tend to beget more oppression, violence and domination. Author Nona Cannon states,

Social systems echo qualities of the people who created them, and of those who allow them to continue when they need changing. Therefore, because social, cultural, economic, and political institutions and structures are created by people, they contain some components conducive to peace (human well-being) and some that cause violence (human inequity). Since our world is one great system with many subsystems, all of which are intricately related, both their violent and their peaceful forces influence each other. The forces tend to be both causes and effects. Violence-causing forces produce other violence. Peace-inducing forces foster human psychic qualities that promote peace. Conditions in families, in culture, and in social systems, which people create, are primarily responsible for the direction of people’s development.

A vicious cycle develops when economic inequalities, unjust social practices, customs, traditions, political fraud, myths and prejudices, that have

been caused by the dominance/violence qualities in people, in turn promote further dominance and violence.”²

This concept implies a certain degree of responsibility for liberation from these ills on perpetrator and victim alike. Therefore, critical to any theory of self and healing that is efficacious to the African in America, i. e., African Americans, must be a clarion response from the African American community to assume responsibility for self-liberation.

The aim of the perpetrator is to dominate, to gain control and power over. The perpetrator’s tactic is to place the victim in isolation, as well as to objectify and dehumanize. Africans were removed from their context and brought to America and forced into a context that was and continues to be foreign and extraneous to their way of being. Therefore, a primary component of the healing moment as well as the moment of dis-ease is contextualization.

Contextualization

According to Webster’s Dictionary, the word *context* refers to: (1) the parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specific word or passage usually influencing its meaning or effect; or (2) the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc. The Latin word *context(us)* means a joining together; the Latin root, *texere*, means to plait, interweave. This definition is consistent with the definition given in the Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide: (1) the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a work or passage and clarify its meaning; (2) the circumstances relevant to something under consideration.³

² Cannon, 21.

³ The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide, s.v. “context.”

Our context is the script of our lives. It provides for us a conceptual framework within which one does meaning-making for existence, behavior, relationships, communication and understanding. As Costas states, "Every human enterprise is contextual in that it is informed and shaped by factors outside itself."⁴ The context is dynamic, ever-changing, always in process.

A community's worldview lies at the heart of culture, interacting, defining and influencing all aspects of that culture. The functions of a worldview are central to life itself, however, if that worldview is in a chaotic state as it transforms to meet a growing crisis, or if that worldview attains a state of stasis, then the potential for imbalance, for dis-ease, coheres, and the healing process is truncated. The understanding of one's reality is compromised. Charles Kraft describes five functions of worldview:

1. The first function is the *explanation* of how and why things got to be as they are and how and why they continue or change. The world view embodies for a people, whether explicitly or implicitly, the basic assumption concerning ultimate things on which they base their lives....

2. The worldview serves an *evaluational*--- a judging and validating function. The basic institutions, values, and goals of a society are ethnocentrically evaluated as best and, therefore, sanctioned by the worldview of their culture or subculture....

3. The worldview of a group also provides *psychological reinforcement* for that group. At points of anxiety or crisis in life it is to one's conceptual system that one turns for the encouragement to continue or the stimulus to take other action....

4. The worldview of a culture or subculture serves an *integrating* function. It systematizes and orders for them their perceptions of reality into an overall design. In terms of this integrated and integrating perspective, then, a people conceptualizes what reality should be like and understands and interprets the multifarious events to which they are exposed....

5. A group's worldview does not completely determine the perception of all its members at all times. Though there is characteristically a very high degree of conservatism to such conceptualization, there is change in this as well as in all other areas of culture.... Ordinarily such conceptual transformation takes place slowly. Sometimes, though, the pressure for rapid change is great. Particularly in the face of such pressure we observe a fifth

⁴ Costas, 4.

function of a people's worldview, which relates directly to the disintegrative aspects of culture change. That function may be labeled *adaptational*.⁵

I argue for the intentional acknowledgement of that inherent, sustaining, central element of the African worldview, in its life-giving dynamism, which pervades all aspects of life, and that is, its spirituality. African spirituality has to be understood explicitly and implicitly as a necessity for the healing and well-being of the African American in the United States.

The *adaptational* function is fueled by this spirituality. This element, African spirituality, the dynamics of which, indeed, are the function itself, has to be taught to ascending generations of the culture, the group, in order to sustain all other functions of the worldview. The primary tool of the group is language, which abides in most of the strategies, theories and models of care that are proposed by social scientists and caregivers of the group; however, language is prohibitive here, for it lacks, as well, the quality of dynamism, particularly when one is loathe to let go of the paradigms that are set by language when language has become static. The propensity for stasis of language heightens at the passing of each generation. Language changes, for each time, as societies move forward, as new beings enter into this space called life. Those changes must be acknowledged and incorporated into our ways of being, for the sake of us all, in our educational systems and in our systems of care, and for our time. To fail to do so, causes isolation and fragmentation of self of segments of the populations of our societies, i.e., the teen population, the homosexual population, the population of the marginalized, etc. Static language propagates dis-ease. For example, the

⁵ Charles H. Kraft, Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 54-57 (original italics).

womanist/mujerista/minjung/feminist agenda, movements that has the liberation of women as a guiding principle, has as one of its goals the reconceptualization of language that evokes images of mere maleness of God, for language influences human perception and human behavior. The roles of African American women, indeed all women in society, have shifted to the point where women are no longer restricted by the laws of the land to pursue rights and privileges that men have always been free to pursue. It becomes the responsibility of the elders of the community, as well as other citizens of the community to sustain the functions of the worldview.

Teaching, too, is dynamic and processual as well. It is an inherent process, embedded in every aspect and layer of communitarian living. Teaching has, as its ultimate goal, liberation and freedom, being and becoming, for both the teacher and the student. Teaching in African and, subsequently, African American communities, takes form in myriad ways. On my class trip to Ghana, Africa, in 2004, we were taught by one of the professors that there exists an elder, traditionally, in practically each village, to whom the villagers turn for counsel on life's issues or when decision-making is at hand. The elder has an investment, a responsibility to the life of each villager, to guide and nurture; each villager has a healthy respect and commitment, an ethical commitment, to seek the counsel of the elder. Mutuality is implied in this relationship; a mutuality that bespeaks respect, honor and valuation of whom each is as a person, as a contributor to the society's well-being. I have discussed in Chapter 3 the use of folktales and the role of the Negro spiritual in teaching and transmitting history, values and language itself. These are methods that have sprung out of the culture, that have arisen from the worldview of African and African American peoples, from their context. In the classrooms of my

primary and secondary education in the all-black schools of the South, teachers engaged in this pedagogy, what I term as *relational pedagogy*. My teachers knew who I was as a student; they knew my family and my family's background, economically, socially and politically. The teachers were encouraged by black school principals to make "home visits" in order to relate and engage parents and caretakers at personal levels. These actions were not merely an expectation of those in authority, but a commitment of the teacher as well. In turn, we students visited our teachers' homes, not by formal invitation, but out of the students' need for reciprocity. Sometimes these visits were out of spontaneity as we took our Sunday afternoon walks. African Americans in the South did not have access, by law, to public parks, swimming pools, libraries and corner drugstores. Our activities during our leisure time were borne out of our creativity, imagination and our spirits. During our visits, I remember always being treated with respect and honor by our teachers. We were engaged and challenged by them on political, social and spiritual matters. This type of relational pedagogy took place in the classroom as well. When I was a fourth grade student in elementary school, a case of rape of a female high school student occurred in the community. In each classroom, the students were gathered by the teacher who informed the students of the incident, named the victim and the rapists, counseled the students on the gravity of the incident and counseled us further on appropriate behaviors regarding both victim and victimizers. I am not espousing a return to methods of teaching of yesterday, which, for this time, could only be mechanistic and pedantic, rather, to a *relational pedagogy*, borne out of the context of our time; a pedagogy that lives, that is dynamic and processual. Process and dynamism are properties of an African spirituality, consequently, African American

spirituality. However, as African American spirituality is evolving today, that spirituality often takes on the character of anachronism, which impedes the healing process. A truth, as I propose it, is that, as long as the element of spirituality, as I have attempted to describe, is inherent in our models, strategies and theories of care for the community, then healing and care is imminent.

The context, then, is an essential component of the healing process, for our context provides the source of our healing. In order for that process to begin, however, it is important to know or acknowledge that there is dis-ease and what the dis-ease is. The community itself has to confront and name its reality.

Confrontation

The new reality for Africans in America was stark and harsh; they were now in a radically different cultural context; nothing in the new land was familiar to them. Many of them could not withstand the brutality of their conditions. Not only were they victims of the physical brutality heaped upon them for infringement of the master's rules, they were victimized psychologically as well, as these conditions were a part of everyday life. To be exploited for the benefit of a nation, and to continue to be victimized upon becoming a citizen of said nation leads one to wonder whether this is the will of God or Higher Power. Certainly, African slaves were taught that such was the case by their Christian masters, replete with biblical foundations. Who is their God or Higher Power? How is that Higher Power named? The face of God had changed radically from the face of God and the lesser gods of Africa. Does a Higher Power exist within the face of violence and violation? These posed questions emerge from the depths of brokenness and dis-ease. However, the questions must be addressed if one is to be liberated; if one is to

be healed; for this quest is a point of departure towards transformation. The face of God changes radically when we are broken or dis-eased; when the selves of slaves and their ascendants have been traumatized so by the vicissitudes of slavery and the systematized racism within the United States. Our images of our Higher Power derive from our theologies, our faith, and our spiritualities. However, our theologies, our faith and our spirituality must be viable; they must be relevant, in order to effect salvation, liberation and healing.

For the healing process to be efficacious in the lives of broken persons in a broken society, acknowledgment of one's condition must occur. Confrontation involves encountering oneself; facing oneself, mediating between the two cultures, the internal and the external, what one's circumstance or context is and what one's brokenness is. That confrontation must be an honest and loving confrontation, and it can be, with the gathered community, both internal and external, both physical and spiritual. One must be able to name oneself and one's brokenness, one's fears, in that moment and accept that naming of self as "is" -- without judgment, in that confrontation with self. One has to undertake a mediative process between these dualisms, the external and the internal, in one's reality. Often, this process is guided by the pastoral caregiver, the community, the teacher, the mentor. However, one must have the hope that one may transcend one's brokenness, to participate in one's own healing, as well, thereby experiencing the reality of one's God. Then, and only then, can transformation happen, can healing happen, can love happen, can empowerment happen, can humility happen, can salvation happen. For to see one's own face, is indeed to see the face of the Ultimate Being. Confrontation of self spawns the dynamism that happens only in community and relationship. God or one's Ultimate

Being is present in one's community, along with other entities that emanate from our worldviews and belief systems. For Africans and African Americans, those entities may consist of ancestors, those who have died and moved into a non-physical (spiritual) realm. These entities continue to interrelate and facilitate one's activity and being in the physical realm. According to Kunene, "The African conception of the non-physical world is made up of relations that continue in very realistic terms. An ancestral feast, or a sacrifice for the Gods is both physical (consolidation of community or clan) and non-physical (appeal for intervention to forces that have more power than humans)."⁶

Fear, indeed, terror, abides in confrontation, for the fragility of our constructions of self, who we be in the world, to the world, is such that when we expose, and are exposed to our theological perceptions of God, the ultimate Being for Christians, we fear greatly that we will be demolished. Therefore, the community risks its own way of being in the world in order to be healed. One must die to self, that is, one must surrender one's ego desires to the community. Confrontation requires a "letting go." The paradigms, the constructions, the masks that we erect in order to present ourselves to our world become rigid, unyielding, and firm as a natural phenomenon. Process and dynamism, in an intentional way, as a matter of choice, must be inherent in our constructions in order for healing and wholeness to occur. Dis-ease occurs when that state of rigidity is prolonged beyond the moment when the paradigm, construction, or mask was transforming, healthful, and productive to one's being. Confrontation of one's self is required in order to ascertain that moment of healthlessness, uselessness or dis-ease.

Confrontation is a communal enterprise; it must happen on many levels. One must confront oneself and others; one must be confronted by others. The ultimate goal of

⁶ Kunene, 5.

confrontation is to know oneself and to experience the depth of self that is unknowable, yet acceptable “as is.” Confrontation provides one with necessary tools for the healing process. The “unknowable” is the mysterious, the spiritual. Accepting one’s self is to gain entry into the chamber of the God, one’s ultimate being, without fear. The experience of confrontation is indeed a spiritual quest. Sallie McFague uses a quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to demonstrate how one may evoke images that may help to feel our world from the inside. McFague’s explication of Teilhard’s quote is analogous to my image and experience of confrontation of self at depth:

He takes a journey into the unknown, the mystery of his own body, and with lamp in hand tries to see and hear what he is not usually aware of: his connection with everything else that has been, is, and will be. The atoms, molecules, and cells that constitute his organic structure connect him in profound ways to everything else in the universe. As he remarks, “My life is not my own,” for although he appears to be an individual to his own consciousness, there lies hidden within him the dense multitude of beings “whose infinitely patient and lengthy labour” has resulted in “the phylum” of which, as he put it, he is “for the moment the extreme bud.”⁷

This experience describes the budding of the moment of choice; it can be a healing moment, however, this moment has the potential for dis-ease as well. McFague’s exposition of Teilhard’s experience, from my perspective, could very well be descriptive of ‘experiencing the queendom/kingdom of God, or one’s Ultimate Being.’ It is the recovery of such an experience in the lives of African Americans that is essential for one to begin to mediate an existence in society that is conducive to an esteemable self.

In an African worldview, everyday reality is integrated into spiritual reality; spiritual reality, into everyday reality. It follows, then, for African Americans whose context and culture is African as well, that theories and therapies, education and religion,

⁷ McFague, 4, in response to a quote of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin from “Cosmic Life,” in Writings in Time of War, trans. Rene Hague (London: William Collins Sons, 1968), 25.

politics and social relations and indeed, all aspects of society are, infused with the dynamic processes that engender life and wholeness.

Community

The Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation. With a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and the world: "I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history, however painful and exploited that history has been. I am black and comely." This self-affirmation is the black man's need made compelling by the white man's crimes against him. This is positive and necessary power for black people.⁸

When confrontation of self happens as I have described, one is plummeted to the depths of self, transcending brokenness and dis-ease, entering into the presence of Divine community. Community is a necessity for life--both spiritual and physical community.

The great African American mystic, Howard Thurman, says,

The human spirit cannot abide the enforced loneliness of isolation. We literally feed on each other; where this nourishment is not available, the human spirit and the human body--both--sicken and die. It is not an overstatement that the purpose of all of the arrangements and conventions that make up the formal and informal agreements under which men live in society is to nourish one another with one another. The safeguards by which individuals or groups of men establish the boundaries of intimate and collective belonging are means ultimately to guarantee self-nourishment. All of these are but social expressions of the underlying experience of life with itself. Life feeds on life; life is nourished by life. It is life's experience with itself that establishes the ground of the dogma that life is eternal.

To seek nourishment is a built-in urge, an ingredient of life in its simplest or complex manifestations. The creative push that expresses itself in this way is the manner by which life realizes itself. The descriptive term that characterizes such behavior is "actualizing potential."⁹

The paradox is that the human urge for community parallels the human urge for isolation.

⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr, Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 43.

⁹ Howard Thurman, The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 3-4.

It is exigent that mediation occur in the moment of choice for either community or isolation or for both/and. Entry into the Divine community is a communal act as well; for all entities gathered there are volitional, energetic, and participatory in one's choices or activity. Entry is not an action that the individual takes alone; the individual acts, is acted upon and with; it is a compelling action, that arises out of paradox, the both/and.

If one's belief system consists of perspectives of the veneration of the ancestors, the living-dead, as traditional Africanists and many African Americans do, if one's belief system consists of belief in the Trinity of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, as do Christians, whatever constitute one's belief system, those corresponding entities become part of one's community, a spiritual community. "The living-dead," according to Mbiti, "is a person who is physically dead but is alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits."¹⁰ Physical community is critical to one's healing as well, for nurture, for care, and for teaching and learning. It is within community that healing is facilitated.

Religious educator Okechukwu Ogbonnaya postulates,

African worldview is characterized by the socioreligious factor of immanent communality and the time-and-distance transcending concepts of relationality. The term *immanent* refers to the fact that relationality is seen as an intrinsic part of being in the world. Transcendence refers to the fact that such a concept of relationality (as well as actuality) is incapable of being fettered by geographic distance or physiological de-carnation (death).¹¹

Ogbonnaya's explication of communalism is a basic and critical concept to be translated and integrated into the worldview of African Americans. It is a fundamental concept that undergirds an understanding of African spirituality. For African Americans, and for my

¹⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 25.

¹¹ A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 23.

argument, this concept, along with its mediation process, must be taught/modeled in the institutions and communities of African Americans today. Mbiti states, “The individual is united with the rest of his community, both the living and the dead, and humanly speaking nothing can separate [the person] from this corporate [community].”¹² The diminution of this African reality within the African American community, through the community’s own mediative processes as they have evolved, have become static, and are less effective for healing and liberation for our time.

The community in which I currently work and live has three small African American churches. I have frequented these churches, from time to time, seeking a connection, a relationship, with the congregations and with the pastors, so that my own soul may be nurtured, but also to facilitate a relationship that will be viable and nurturing for Berea College’s African American student population. African American students are welcomed into these churches, however, their attendance and participation are short-lived. One of these churches, Farristown Baptist Church, hired a new pastor. In light of this, a group of sixteen to twenty-five students began to frequent the church. The pastor began to send the church’s bus to the campus to pick them up. However, in slightly less than six weeks, their attendance had dwindled to five. Informally, I queried about fifty percent of this group, as to their reasons for their discontinuation of attendance. They cited reasons, such as, “the kinds of songs that they sing are old and slow, we don’t know those songs,” “they don’t have much activity in their church that caters to young people; the things that they offer, bible study, Sunday school, choir, are not geared toward us,” or “it’s just not exciting; it’s dead; I believe the pastor tries, but it doesn’t work.” Of the remaining five who continue to attend sporadically, they state, “It’s okay. I need to go to

¹² Mbiti, 111.

church somewhere,” “I prefer an African American church, besides, I don’t have a car and they pick me up.” I interpret these responses to mean that these students are not feeling the spiritual connections and relationships that they require for their own vitality, healing, and liberation.

These barriers to the relationships and connections all emanate from outmoded, dualistic paradigms that the pastors and congregants alike, are unwilling to let go of; paradigms that provide for the churches a basis for theology, church tenets and doctrine, and for interpretation of scriptures; all of which influence its activity and ministry of care. Maintaining such a rigid hold on these paradigms flies in the face of the idea of community; promulgates stasis, isolation, and a plethora of programs that exist to serve that state of paralysis, of dis-ease--for example, the exclusion of women from leadership roles that are on par with men in leadership roles. There exists in these churches a structure of hierarchy that posits men at the top. In the main, there are many Black churches that are inclusive of females as leaders in the church, however, in many of these churches, the hierarchical structure remains; women simply fill in those spaces that were once held by males only. Upon visiting one of the churches in Berea for the first time, I was introduced to the pastor by a long-time member, who stated that I was an ordained minister as well. She, then, walked away, leaving us there to talk. I extended my hand to him as a greeting; he simply turned away. I was stunned; I later learned from my friend that he believed that women should not be ministers; he was making me aware of that by his action. I have returned to his church on several occasions; he continues to refuse to acknowledge my presence there.

These practices of the churches in Berea are steeped in tradition, as are many other Black congregations in the United States. Yet, there are many who do practice an ethic of inclusivity and respect for humankind.

Outmoded paradigms that formulate the basis for the presence of the Black Church as an institution of care, unfortunately serve to isolate the African American from a primary source of healing.

Differentiation

When the self is isolated, and we are driven by our fear, anxiety, anger, hate, and arrogance, when we are not connected, interrelated with all the earth, then the potential for differentiation in that moment is duly affected. The potential for choices that are constructive for the community is lessened; we risk the loss of potential to heal and for healing.

Differentiation is closely related to discernment. One must have clear perception in order to differentiate, to make choices in the midst of dis-ease and brokenness. One's courage to risk is compelled, is driven by differentiation. Discernment/differentiation emanate from the spirit, is indeed a gift of the spirit; the nature of our community determines how we differentiate. Morton Kelsey says,

If there are gifts and if they can be given by the demonic as well as the angelic, by the spirit of destruction as well as by the Spirit, it is terribly important to know about it...Discernment is necessary because there is a real spiritual world with elements that are neutral, elements that are destructive, and elements that protect one and lead one to God. Discernment is necessary because we are very complicated human beings....We have a physical body of incredible complexity and a psychic aspect to our humanness that is even more intricate. In order to be sure that gifts come from God we must be quite certain that they do not arise in the depth and complexity of our humanness.¹³

¹³ Morton Kelsey, Discernment: A Study in Ecstasy and Evil (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 8-9.

Differentiation is an internal mediative process between the natures of the spiritual world to which Kelsey refers in the above quote--that is, elements that are destructive, elements that are constructive, and elements that are neutral. These elements are all in interplay, in mediation with one another. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have named the representation of the destructive elements, "passion," which characterizes our brokenness or dis-ease, anger, anxiety, fear, etc., and is based upon behavior, and ultimately, feelings. Because one's "passion" shifts and is fluid, depending on one's context, I have termed this state, the "pseudo-self." Brokenness and dis-ease arise from one's pseudo-self. For the African American, that context is the violent, brutal, and dehumanizing context of slavery, segregation and racism and concomitant acts stemming from these institutions. A redeeming quality of one's passion is that it points one toward one's true self. The quest for wholeness is begun, prompted by one's passion.

The representation for the constructive elements of this dynamism I have termed "compassion," which is comprised of a community of entities, constituting a social self, and is based on what one has learned through worldviews, traditions, customs, religions, etc., and one's context. For the African American, this context would include the Black Church, healing modalities, educational institutions and the face of their teachings. I have termed this organism, the "true self." This is a basal self; it is fundamental and is a gift of creation. It is this self that is covered with the maskings of life.

It is within the dynamic of mediation that differentiation occurs, one is face to face with self and community in this moment, where all is possible, depending on one's choice to live in the moment of the pseudo self or the true self or to live in both/and, which I have termed paradox.

The level of differentiation that occurs in this moment determines what one's healing looks like to the world and to self. The level of differentiation yields the face of one's discernment.

This is the essence of an African spirituality emanating from an African worldview, and evolving for our time. Inherent in African spirituality are the properties of process and dynamism which contain the potential for change and transformation. The diminution of an African worldview, which spawns African spirituality, by African Americans lessens the activity of the spirit and spiritual in everyday life. We deprive ourselves of opportunities to learn, to be taught, to become and to be. The "religious" experience is placed in the realm of the supernatural, not to manifest as a natural way of being.

The Reclamation of Wisdom

Throughout this project, I have ascribed properties to African spirituality that imply vitality, relevancy, relationality, communality and processuality. These properties yield dynamism. Dynamism is not a feigned or constructed action; it arises out of a context and possesses an energy that spawns creativity and authenticity. In order to reclaim our wisdom, to claim a sense of self that elicits and compels empowerment and transformation, that thrusts one into dynamic processes, our strategies and theories of care must be undergirded by African spirituality, as I have presented in this dissertation.

Pathways to reclamation and claiming of self are embedded within our institutions--the Black church, schools and colleges, health care systems, and family systems. In all aspects of life, a pathway or opportunity exists to instill and demonstrate

knowledge about who we are. That knowledge translates into wisdom when mediated, appropriated and integrated into the self.

Throughout this dissertation, I have shared stories of my own experiences of living and being in the vortex of African spirituality. They have been stories from my past and present with me in the role of participant, co-creator, observer, and recipient. They have been stories that reflect connectedness, relationality, process, and community. They have been stories that reflect pedagogy in all aspects of life. They have been stories that demonstrate the passing on of knowledge, of our history, of our survival, and ultimately, of hope. These stories have demonstrated as well, the responsibility of elders to the community to engender life, health and wholeness concomitant with the respect due the elders by the community.

These stories are the message and the medium; they are the content and the means through which lessons are taught. A number of years ago, my father, at the age of 88, began to ready himself for his transition into the next reality, that is, for his passing on. I was living in California, many miles away from the family home in Alabama. I had been told by my family throughout my father's decline that he was ill with Alzheimer's disease. However, at this particular time in my life, I felt compelled to take leave of absence from my studies and my job to travel to Alabama and assess the situation for myself. While there, in the course of my assistance in putting the house in order for my mother's habitation after my father's death, he and I had many profound conversations that were didactical in nature even in his weakened state. Although I knew that my father was dying, and was compelled to implement the work in the house, on another level, as his daughter, I was resistant to the actuality of his death, which lent to an argumentative

tone, on my part, to some of our conversations.

One day, my father left the house to go “home” as he had begun to do toward the latter weeks of his decline. He was sometimes rescued by someone in the community during these excursions when he would fall down and have difficulty getting up. I found him just outside the house preparing to walk away. As I attempted to convince him to return inside the house, an argument ensued. He reminded me that he was my parent; that he should be the one telling me what to do. As the argument developed, I responded to him, “You can’t tell me how I feel.” My father looked at me in sheer disbelief, as if I had no right to be so dense and said, “I know how you feel.” In that moment, I knew that he knew, and said, “You’re right.” He then gently added, “You see, Gal, you know more than I do.” I responded, “Daddy, how could you say something like that?” His statement had distressed me intensely. In an effort to calm me, we returned to the house. I returned to California some time later. After I was there for about nine days, my father passed away in Alabama.

I was happy that I had spent those last days with my father, however, my grief for him was subtly overwhelming. I would feel moments of sadness that would produce tears while I was shopping, eating in a restaurant or at other inopportune times. After about six months of these moments, I decided that I would take some time, sequester myself in my apartment, light some candles, place objects of comfort and objects that belonged to my father around the room and settle into a comfortable chair to meditate and to confront my grief. In less than thirty minutes, this vision ensued:

I was in an enclosed courtyard of an old red brick mansion. The courtyard was enclosed by red brick, as well, with a wrought iron gate. I was seated on a cement bench in a fetal position, my arms clasped around my drawn-up knees. I mused, “I want to see beyond the gate.” I rose and

looked beyond the gate. I saw a vast meadow with wild flowers and butterflies and the horizon beyond it. I again mused, "I want to see beyond the horizon." I frolicked through the meadow until I reached its edge. I came suddenly upon the foundation of a small burnt-out country church. As I walked past the church, I saw a cemetery in back of the church. In the cemetery to my left, was a choir of people, from all ages, and of all ages. Playing among the people were two boys, ten and eleven, running in and out of the rows of people. I proceeded to about the sixth row and came face to face with a 13 year old eighteenth century char girl standing at the end of that row. She was clothed in a long gingham dress with a white pinafore. I stared at her, amazed at what I was seeing, and said, "I have met myself." She replied, "Yes, you are all of us, and all of us is you." I felt relieved and enlightened. I glanced upward, and there on a plateau were four African American elders; one was warming himself at a pot-bellied stove, one was seated, holding a musical instrument he had invented, one was simply standing, smoking his pipe. In the forefront was my father, standing at the edge of the plateau, dressed in blue denim overalls with his thumbs hitched behind the straps. He had been watching the whole time. I exclaimed in surprise, "Daddy!" He responded, "Yeap, Gal, that's it. You got it."

It was in this moment that I understood explicitly and definitively the power of the progenitors of humanity and the empowerment of their activity in one's life; the interconnectedness of all things, and the African saying, "I am because we are, we are, therefore, I am." I understood the source of my knowledge, the source of my wisdom. I understood the ritual of Kwanzaa of pouring libation to the ancestors in veneration of who they are. My father, in this vision, had shown me the bounty of wisdom to which I had access.

The African American community must dare to transcend its own brokenness to participate in its own healing. Its models of care must emanate out of particular contexts within the community, borne out of relationship and community.

Conclusion

If the premise is accepted that religion is the creation of humankind, then humankind must look more closely and honestly at the problems and issues in life that

our religious beliefs and theologies are created to resolve or transcend, i.e., war, loneliness, hunger and destruction of the literal earth. As our ill-mediated dualisms, inherent and rife in our society, continue to present as issues and problems that proliferate to a greater extent than they subside, Black theologies and the Black church must begin to change the face of its mediations. For without this change, the African American community has little hope of reclaiming its sources of wisdom, which is embedded in the ancient traditions and worldviews of Africa. Matthew Fox, in Original Blessings, questions, "Is religion willing to let go of outdated, dualistic paradigms...to recover?...To recover the wisdom that is lurking in religious traditions, we have to let go of more recent religious tradition."¹⁴

The religious and theological traditions of African American people reside in the bowels of Africa, embedded in her indigenous religions, her worldviews, her customs, mores and values. The institution of Slavery in the United States provided a new perspective for African peoples, arising out of European culture and values and its dualistic worldviews. For the African American, whose feet tread both soils, the face of liberation will derive from the skill, art, and wholism with which we engage in the mediation of our worlds.

In our assimilation/acculturation processes since being brought to this land as slaves, we, African Americans, have engaged in mediative processes that devalue the traditions of Africa in order to embrace the new land. African Americans have been complicitous in the mediations of those who lead this nation and who have chosen to live in the moments of passion in their own lives.

¹⁴ Fox, Original Blessings, 10.

That face of mediation, which does not maintain a dialectical, paradoxical tension; which harbors and fosters stasis more often than dynamism and interrelation, deprives us of the power that fuels the passion/compassion. Reclaiming the source of our knowledge and wisdom is the source of our healing and our liberation.

For a long time I thought that because I had lived and traveled in Africa, I was able to see clearly the great quality of power, openness and balance that struck me in Black women...but when I came back to America and looked into the face of my mother, I saw it all there. Then I was reminded that it had always been there, in her eyes and in my grandmother's eyes too. It had only been clouded by my experience of living in America. Finally, I understood that Africa, Mother Africa, gave birth to us all.¹⁵

¹⁵ Feelings, introduction to Now Sheba Sings the Song.

EPILOGUE

There is something that lives in the center of me;

That expands until it hits reality.

Then it contracts, squeezes...and the tears come.

They form...but they will not flow.

It is the fear of life, of living that expands.

The reality that it hits is my situation, my condition, my context.

There is something else there, too, that lives...that will not let the tears flow.

It is the Presence of God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, that abides there.

It is the presence of my mother, my father, and all those who have passed on before me.

The extent of my tears measures the faith that I have

To seek and see their faces there;

To see my own face, mirrored in theirs.

Give me faith! One more measure!

As I receive this gift, I am not as aware as I would like to be

In terms of appropriating this gift or even understanding it.

And I cry again...the tears flow at my inadequacy;

*For I know that life, my life, living in the fullness of this moment, depends on my
mediation of this gift.*

I do not know how to receive

what I want and need so badly.

I realize that You All are there

And your gift is there.

This is the healing moment.

I must transcend my own brokenness, dis-ease to participate in this moment.

The decision is mine...to accept it or not.

Free Will

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